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Theme Issue:
Out of the Mainstream

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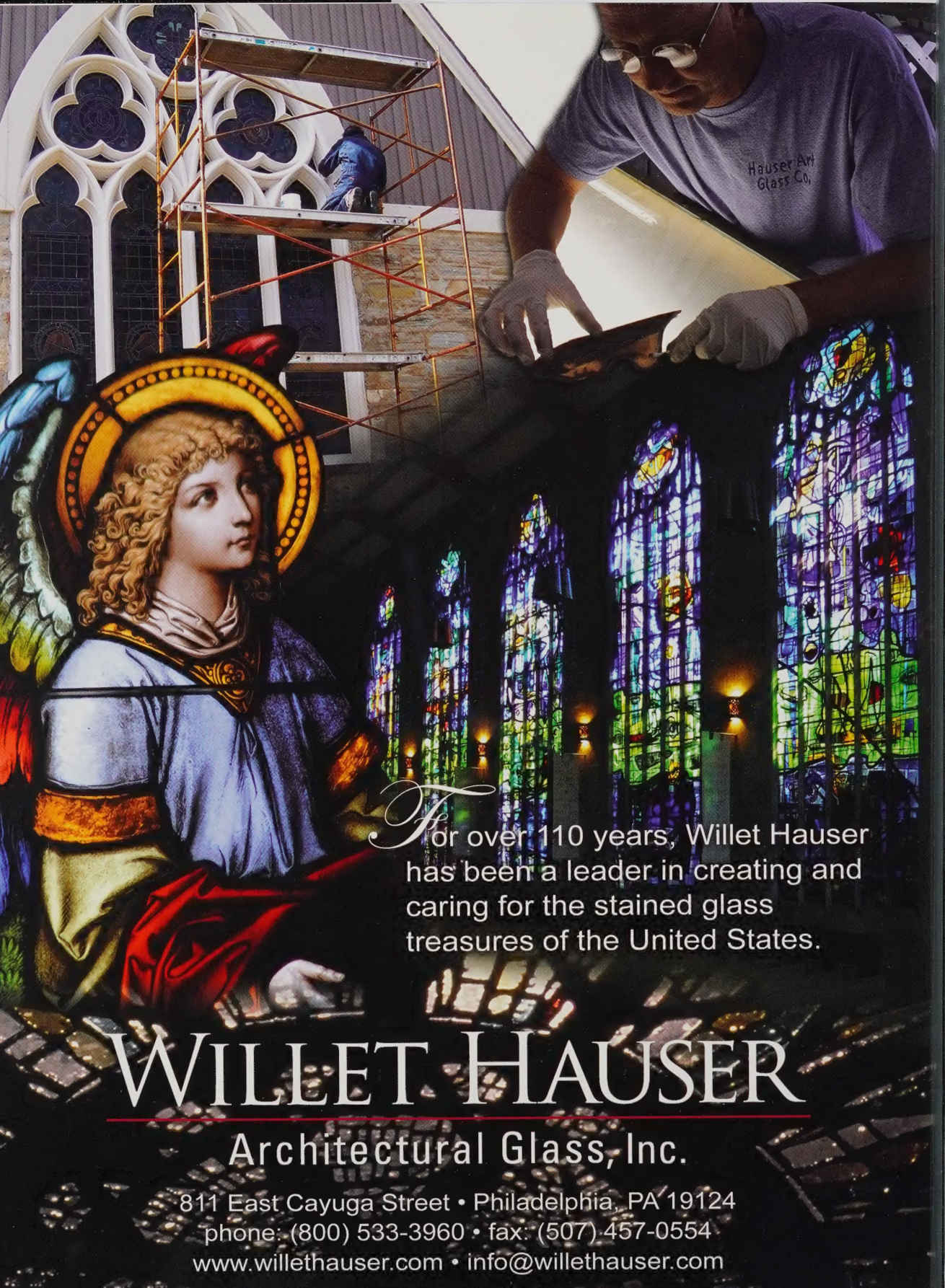

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Photo by Thomas Fisher; rendering by Dave Kuhar, the media cellar, inc.

ON THE COVER:

Interior of Solomon's Porch in Minneapolis, Minnesota, an Emergent Church. Is this the church of the future? This issue explores the theme of "Out of the Mainstream" with a look at emerging churches, growing faith communities, and religious traditions taking root in the U.S. *(article begins on page 9).*

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The Gift that Keeps on Taking

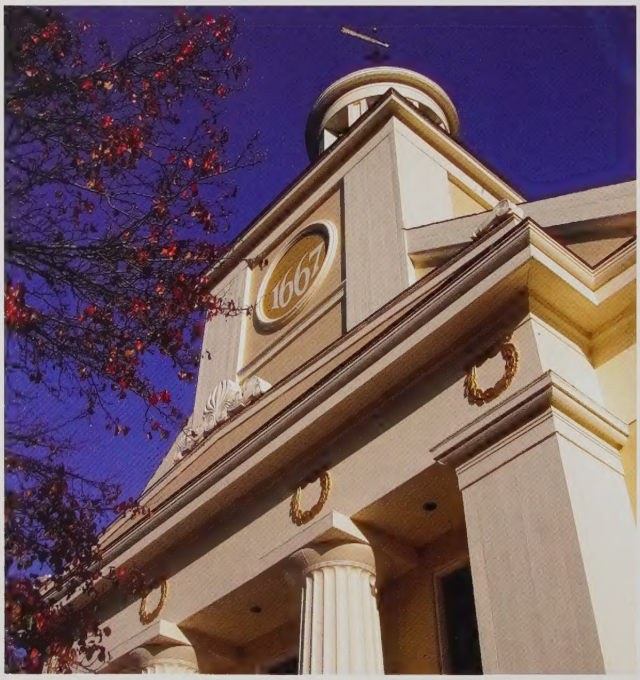
EDITOR'S PAGE ✶ MICHAEL J. CROSBIE

I'm on the Buildings and Grounds Committee of my church. Recently an email from our committee chair let us know that a parishioner had come forward to donate an irrigation system for our memorial garden. The chair wanted the committee's feedback on the gift. "Sounds good to me" was the general reaction, so I felt like a wet blanket when I wrote back that I thought accepting this gift would be a mistake.Typically the offer of a gift from a parishioner is a no-brainer, especially during this time of tight budgets and the need to shave operating costs wherever a congregation can. But this one, for me, was a "brainer." I expressed my concern that the gift seemed to ignore the fact that water resources are becoming more strained around the world. Our parish supports a poor church in Mozambique; how, I asked, could we accept the gift of a new irrigation system that would effectively make clean, drinkable water all the more precious for this very same church, albeit in the larger scheme of things? Shouldn't our decision about accepting this gift be contingent upon the features of the irrigation system? Is it one that conserves water? Might it draw most of its supply from collected rainwater, so that no potable water would be used for irrigation? What if we considered replacing the water-thirsty garden plants with drought-resistant varieties, effectively eliminating the need for this gift altogether? I even suggested we take the cost of the gift and donate that amount to an existing global fund to help provide potable water in places where it is still a rarity. Our rector quickly emailed back and informed everyone on the committee that this gift was not a monetary one, it was an irrigation system…take it or leave it.

Questions about the nature of gifts uncover the costs that congregations might have to pay for such generosity. Most congregations won't accept gifts without careful consideration of their esthetic impact, or the cost of upkeep, or a dozen other sensitive issues revolving around parish politics and history. Sustainability, I believe, should be high on the list of considerations about whether a gift should or should not be accepted. Green design, conservation, and earth stewardship are now important factors for many congregations in expressing their faith in community. But the link needs to be made real between what we espouse and how we act, even when we are offered a gift. It's an especially touchy decision: yes, we would welcome the chance to keep our garden beautiful, but at what cost? Does such a gift take more than it gives? What does the gift say about the congregation's ethics in terms of social responsibility and the just use of God-given resources?

If your congregation has a sustainability policy in place, does it cover the acceptance of gifts? Such a policy should not be defined by who is serving on the buildings and grounds committee; it should be discussed, adopted by the congregation as a whole, written down, and considered for every gift offered. If sustainability isn't deemed important in deciding whether or not to accept a gift, it should be. Bring it up to the leadership of your congregation for discussion and consideration. Be a wet blanket.

MICHAEL J. CROSBIE IS THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF OF *FAITH & FORM* AND CAN BE REACHED BY EMAIL AT MCROSBIE@FAITHANDFORM.COM



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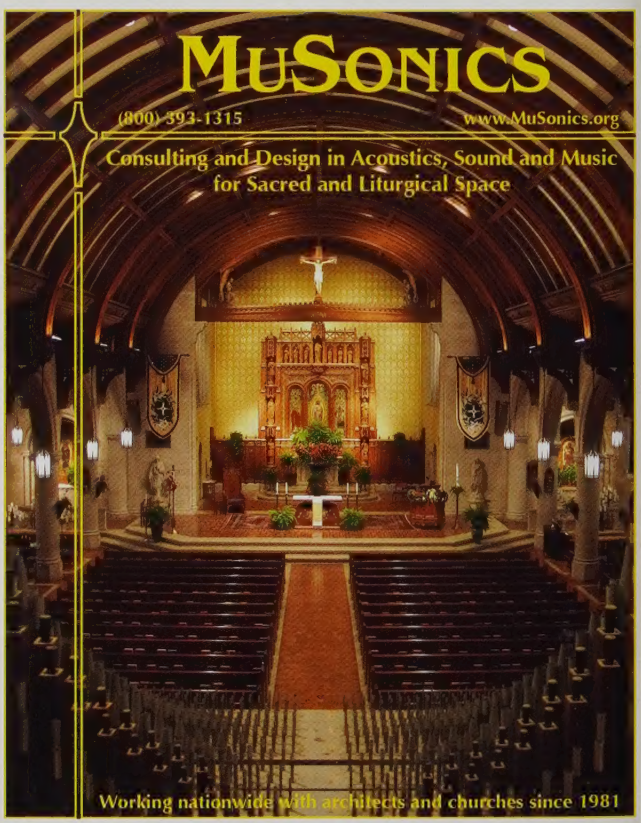
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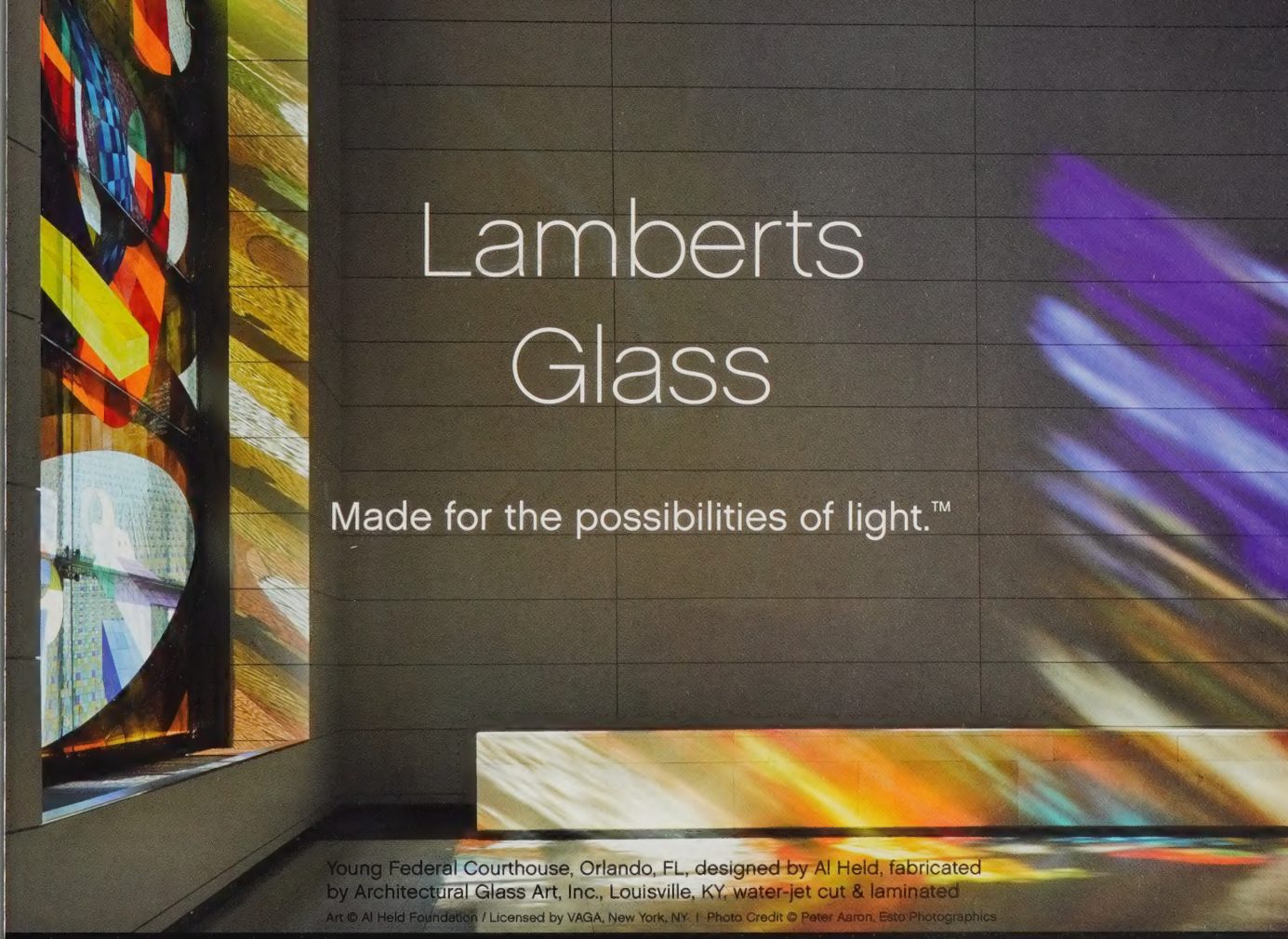

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The Changing Face Of Religion In America

What does it mean for architects and artists? By Richard S. Vosko

The Healing Place Church Arena is part of a large church project in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, that caters to all aspects of a congregant's life.

When Volume One of *Faith & Form* was released in 1967, the United States was on the verge of two assassinations, was embroiled in an unwanted conflict in Vietnam, and had an unemployment rate of 3.3 percent. While most religious congregations maintained the status quo, others, in the style of "The Sixties," took to the pulpits and streets to protest war, racism, and gender inequality. Generally, attendance in mainline religions was high and stable, e.g., 70 percent of Catholics attended church regularly compared with about 35 percent today. Although the mainstream architectural context of that era may have been midcentury modern, most houses of worship replicated the designs found in the European homelands of first-generation American immigrants. Such a familiar architectural vernacular would also offer a sense of spiritual continuity and security for post-World War II baby boomers.

Today, some studies claim that the religious scene in American is going through a transition that, perhaps, began in the 1960s. For example, the Pew Religious Landscape Survey of 35,000 American adults (www.religions.pewforum.com) finds that 28 percent of those who responded have left the religion they were raised in and 44 percent have switched religions or have dropped affiliation completely. Fifteen percent of those polled in the 2008 American Religious Identification Survey (www.americanreligionsurvey-aris.org) said they were not affiliated with a religion.

Other research suggests there are signs of stability and even steady congregational growth. J. Gordon Melton of the Baylor Institute for the Study of American Religion (www.isreligon.org) reports that the number of non-affiliates today has actually decreased dramatically since the early 1900s. Although it appears that religious behavior is in a state of flux and that the mainstream religions (Protestant, Catholic, Jewish) are struggling to keep members, the Association of Religion Data Archives (www.thearda.com) reminds us that, collectively, Americans are still very religious in beliefs and practice when compared to other nationalities. Spiritual development, one could say, is not necessarily dependent on religious affiliation.

How does a shift in religious behavior affect the contributions of architects and artists who specialize in places of worship? If churches and synagogues express the identity of those who gather there and if those congregations are dwindling, merging, or vacating, what symbolic or theological statement do those buildings make? If the trend in newer nondenominational churches is to avoid traditional religious symbolism and imagery, are there any design formulas that distinguish those buildings from those in banal shopping malls? Finally, is there any desire at all to express the belief system or teleology (the end purpose) of the congregation in built forms and works of art?

While it is impossible to answer all of these questions, a good place to begin is for design professionals to explore the data that track the demographic, social, and spiritual shifts taking place in religious groups. One comprehensive study is called "Faith Communities Today" and the "Cooperative Congregations Study Project" (www.faithcommunitiestoday.org). Sponsored by the Hartford Institute for Religion Research the project regularly releases its findings. One of the reports, "American Congregations 2008" by David A. Roozen, is based on a study of 14,201 churches, synagogues, temples, and mosques. Also available on the Web site is a timely article titled, "Changes in American Megachurches: Tracking Eight Years of Growth and Innovation in the Nation's Largest-attendance Congregations."

The most accessible compilation of facts and figures, however, is found in *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us* by Robert Putnam and David Campbell (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010). This enormous work is based largely on the "Faith Matters Survey"

Coffee and reading materials are becoming more common in faith communities that seek to become 'Third Places.'

More stadium than sanctuary, the Healing Place Church is standard megachurch fare.

(www.ropercenter.uconn.edu) conducted for Harvard University by International Communications Research. With 3,108 respondents the data give metrics for "religious belief and behavior to help scholars determine relative stability among different subpopulations and as compared to nonreligious beliefs and behaviors." The authors have managed to create a readable volume that summarizes the findings of this survey and others.

The chapter on "Innovations in Religion" documents reasons for fluidity in congregational affiliation, e.g., joining a spouse's congregation and finding a church close to home (p. 175). The chapter also refers to the "emerging" church which is described by the authors as an ongoing innovation in American religion that focuses less on a style of worship and more on what people do (p. 178). It also says the emerging church blends traditional religious symbolism with modern technology. The word "emerging" suggests that this church has not yet established strong roots: that it is still unfolding. Therefore, a church that is emerging is in an experimental stage that is likely to change as it grows, resulting in more fluctuation. Whether Americans who are concerned about the development of moral certitude on many issues can tolerate such inconstancy is a major question for all religions.

Worship in the emerging church is different not only from mainline religions but also from the independent nondenominational churches. It is often described as leaderless and taking place in nonconventional places such as a home, a restaurant, a tavern, or online. The ritual frequently is a mixture of patterns, texts, and objects borrowed from older religious traditions. Some writers have referred to this practice as "ancient future." Scot McKnight describes it this way in his article "Five Streams of the Emerging Church" (*Christianity Today*, January 19, 2007). "Many in the emergent movement are creative, experiential, and sensory in their worship gatherings." Emerging Christians, according to McKnight, wonder if there is another way to express – theologically, aesthetically and anthropologically – what we do when we gather. For example, would there be a clearer sense of the priesthood of all believers if the preacher were on the same level as the congregation?

The emerging religious movement is not only a Christian phenomenon. Jewish leaders are also monitoring the shifts that are taking place in their congregations. As in other denominations a prime target is the 18-39-year-old group who feel disenfranchised from their congregations. The Working Group on Emergent Sacred Communities (www.synagogue3000.org) has committed itself to establishing transformative spiritual communities unrestrained by the conventional understanding of what a synagogue congregation is supposed to be.

In every study and commentary mentioned above there are no direct questions or opinions about the architecture of the worship space. It is hard, therefore, to determine if the style of the building, the arrangement of seats, or the presence of religious symbols is an important factor in someone's decision to leave a congregation, join another, or not practice at all. The good news for the design professions is that the lack of information in the data about the significance of architectural styles has not altogether erased interest in sacred space. Conferences and organizations dedicated to the topic are numerous. There appears also to be a strong desire to breathe new life into venerable old buildings. Partners for Sacred Places is one nonprofit organization that assists congregations in maintaining and restoring their houses of worship (www.sacredplaces.org).

The Worship Facilities Conference & Expo (www.wfxweb.com) is an example of how some congregations want new technologically advanced buildings to house their programs and worship. The WFX brochure claims that 76 percent of the churches attending the conference and expo "are planning, considering, or in the process of building and/or upgrading their church technology and facilities." This annual gathering attracts thousands of pastoral leaders looking for the latest information on building and construction methods, technical products, and social media. The speakers' program is designed to address timely approaches to community and team building, administration, and fundraising, as well as conflict management and resolution.

In the face of what are sometimes confusing data about the state of religious life in America, architects, designers, artists and pastors can continue to play a role in creating efficient and prayerful places of worship. However, it is important for these professionals to be aware of those programmatic requirements that have surfaced as absolutes. Hospitality, charisma, outreach, technology, and sustainability are key components in any large or small, old or new worship facility. New religious campuses are best described generically. They are conveniently located, they offer ample parking, they have hospitable gathering areas, bookstores, and coffee shops, they are safe and secure places for all children's programs, they employ up-to-date technology to support lively worship music and preaching, and they are "green."

Even though abundant information is available on the subject of religion in America there are simply not enough data to suggest that places of worship are no longer required or important. Eventually, as a new congregation emerges it will soon discover a need to house those events that will serve not only the needs of the congregation but also their outreach programs. The desire to create prayerful experiences that make the congregation feel bodily refreshed, mentally affirmed, and spiritually satisfied while worshiping God and tending to one another's needs is very important. How design professionals can express these expectations in built form continues to be an acceptable challenge. Perhaps the large sign in front of a megachurch in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, publicly states what a church is supposed to be today: "The Healing Place for a Hurting World."

Richard S. Vosko, Ph.D., Hon. AIA (www.rvosko.com), is a *Faith & Form* Editorial Advisor and the past chairperson of IFRAA. He is currently writing a book on all the Catholic Cathedrals in the U.S.

Further Reading

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Blessed are the Laid Back

How the Emergent Church Movement is Questioning Mainline Religion

Text and photos by Ellen Fisher

Solomon's Porch appears as a fairly conventional church from the exterior.

The interior of Solomon's Porch is anything but conventional as far as traditional churches go.

As members of the "Y" or Echo Generation, born in the 1980s and early 1990s, my age group spent our youth witnessing the rise of the religious right. Megachurches blossomed across the country as mainline religions consummated their move to the suburbs. The big-box churches allowed more congregants to gather and worship in one space, and charismatic religious leaders became megastars as they occupied center stage (and, in some cases, TV time) to convey messages to their congregants on a grand scale. The megachurch movement seemed to shift religious consciousness away from social justice in favor of morality. Conservatism, consumerism and cyberspace took precedence, while simplicity, personal interactions between church leaders and the congregants, and a concise faith community seemed to disappear.

Today, the conflict between freedom and fundamentalism has found religious expression in the "Emergent Church" movement. The Emergent Church has closed the hymnal and turned on the projector, and my generation has responded. Given birth by a number of Christians disillusioned with highly structured congregations and traditional religions, the Emergent Church focuses on the individual faith experience, something often overlooked in more established denominations. A shift away from making Church more relevant to the outsider also occurred with the rise of the Emergent Church. As megachurches focused on drawing in the "unchurched" and the "spiritual but not religious," a dynamic emerged within those communities that mimicked that of producer and consumer, or entertainer and entertained. To many in my generation, megachurches have a fake, theatrical production feel to them. The Emergent Church movement sensed that discomfort within congregations and developed a paradigm that replaced rituals, songs, and symbols that had lost their meaning with a seeker-sensitive, community-centered mode of worship.

The Emergent Church is part of the larger emerging church movement, which is also very much present within the Jewish faith, as Jewish communities faced the challenge of bringing a sense of authenticity to a generation that seemed disillusioned with the rigidity and seemingly stagnant assumptions and traditions of Judaism. The emphasis on social justice, community focus, and flexibility led to the great

Space within Solomon's Porch is dedicated to congregants pursuing the arts.

expansion of the Jewish Emergent movement, which seeks to return to the fundamentals of learning, Torah study, and performing acts of loving kindness in the world.

The Emergent Church emphasizes the need for faith and practice to be present in the daily lives of people, not stuck within the bounds of church walls. As a result, some have called the Emergent Church post-evangelical, post-conservative, post-liberal, and post-charismatic, indicative of how it defies labels. But however much difficulty we have in pinning down this movement, all participants in the Emergent Church have a post-hierarchical character, with fluid identities that cater to the needs of each community that they serve.

The way the Emergent Church occupies space shows how far the movement has strayed from both old mainline religions and the newer fundamentalist ones. Many Emergent Churches inhabit formerly religious buildings, although they will often take out the pews so that everyone can face each other in a circle, with the leader in the center. Others occupy formerly commercial buildings, with art work, photography, and book shelves scattered about, looking more like a community craft fair than a traditional worship space. For my generation, the appeal of Emergent Churches lies in their deviation from hierarchy and from denominational affiliation.

Emergent Churches have also appealed to those seeking an alternative worship space to that of the megachurches that arose in the '80s and '90s. Those churches tried to fuse religion with contemporary culture by transforming worship spaces into large, theater-like settings to provide immersive experiences relevant to congregants' lives. Megachurches frequently offered high-energy audio/visual worship in large auditoriums that had rock bands, projection screens, and charismatic leaders. Although such churches attracted many baby boomers, their fundamental lack of intimacy turned off many in my generation.

Emergent Churches, instead, highlight the individual worship experience, emphasizing conversations about faith rather than testimonials of faith, and focusing on what is real and true in the world rather than on the formalities and theatrical productions of megachurches. Informal, nonconformist, individually oriented, and community based, Emergent Church worship spaces reflect my generation's dissatisfaction with all that did not work for us in mainstream, evangelical religion.

In Emergent Churches, who you are doesn't matter nearly as much as what the church is doing and talking about. Unlike denominations that rely heavily on dogma, creeds, and the teachings of clergy to guide the community of believers, Emergent Churches use conversation, and emphasize equality out of a belief that God exists in every person and that every person should have the opportunity to articulate what God is doing for them in their lives. The uniqueness of Emergent Churches lies in the ability of community members to discuss, challenge, and raise issues in response to scripture as they see fit during the worship service, rather than in a small Bible or Torah study class.

Solomon's Porch

Solomon's Porch is a nationally recognized Emergent Church located in the heart of Minneapolis, Minnesota. Its pastor, Doug Pagitt, is an internationally renowned and often-criticized leader in the movement, who

founded Solomon's Porch in 2000 as a Holistic Missional Community to help congregants share their faith journey with one another. Shying away from calling themselves an institution or a structured church, Solomon's Porch congregants prefer to think of themselves as a collective encouraged to express faith through writing, art, and music, and to articulate truth as each person sees it. Many Emergent Church followers view Christ's teachings as radical, and find inspiration outside of traditional worship forms, maintaining the values of Jesus while encouraging genuine, meditative, and thoughtful connections to God.

The worship space reflects the nontraditional nature of Solomon's Porch. Because the Emergent Church movement sees faith as an open discussion rather than blind adherence to doctrine, the main worship space is laid out in a set of concentric circles that echo the movement's opposition to hierarchy and social status. Rather than focusing on the front and back of the church, as in traditional worship spaces, Solomon's Porch draws your attention to the center of the church, around which the congregation gathers.

No pews or traditional chairs exist in the sanctuary. Instead, all of the congregants sit on a ragtag bunch of loveseats and sofas, most of which look as though members of the church had found them on the curb with a "free" sign on them. The pastor facilitates discussion and leads worship from a simple stool at the center of the space, making the service more casual (and to some, more genuine) while emphasizing the equality between the pastor and the community. By sitting in the center of the circle, the pastor takes on the role of discussion facilitator rather than preacher. Meanwhile, the outer edge of the worship space has a distinct coffee shop atmosphere, with kitchen tables and chairs scattered along the periphery of the sanctuary. Tea lights, candelabra, and accent lighting add a casual aesthetic that encourages conversation; sharing stories seems more natural when sitting around a table or on a sofa.

The sanctuary design also reflects the concept of community. In the traditional altar space of many mainline churches where a cross would stand, or in many evangelical churches where a projection screen would hang, Solomon's Porch has the wall decorated with drawings and paintings of and by community members. The artwork, which surrounds a cross hanging on the wall, serves as a visual reminder that the community values the individual congregants and their walk through faith.

The music at Solomon's Porch hints at traditional megachurch worship in the sense that you won't find hymnals. Instead, congregants sing lyrics that are projected on two screens on opposing walls in the sanctuary. But unlike much contemporary megachurch music – with its rock bands, drum sets, and electric guitars – the music in Solomon's Porch is low key, acoustic, and soft. Rather than energizing the congregation, Solomon's Porch's music has a downbeat and melancholic quality, encouraging reflection and meditation; the calm and nonintrusive music and dim lighting create a tranquil atmosphere. In contrast to many megachurches, which use music to encourage excitement and emotional response to bring the congregants closer to some sense of the divine, Solomon's Porch encourages meditation and the quieting of the senses to allow the congregation to reflect on what is

Artisan co-op space within the church allows local artists to display their work for possible sale.

Illustrations and artwork by and of Solomon's Porch congregants.

Rather than the traditional bread and wine of most Christian denominations, congregants at Solomon's Porch share a range of foodstuffs at their gatherings.

meaningful in their own lives and to make sense of the experiences they have had.

How Casual is Too Casual?

Some have criticized the Emergent Church movement for being too casual and lax in its worship, but how casual is too casual? On the night I attended worship, the service started 25 minutes late and, from where I sat, I could see ten people texting on their cell phones. Directly in front of me sat two people playing a video game on a hand-held device. This casualness remained ever-present throughout the service, which included opening songs, announcements, and the showing of a video clip followed by discussion, the offering of communion, and the wandering off of congregants. The worship leader announced communion and the congregation moved about the sanctuary visiting and munching on baguette bread laid out across the sanctuary. Communion time also signaled the end of the service, as far as I could tell, since many congregants wandered out of the building afterward, while others gathered around the sanctuary to discuss the books they were reading in their book clubs, their favorite yoga studio, and where to find the best coffee in Minneapolis.

With such a strong reaction against the hierarchy, organization, and centralization of power found in traditional denominations, the Emergent Church movement faces the danger of losing the necessary checks and balances that exist in mainline churches. With no central oversight of congregations, the leadership and direction of the church rest solely in the hands of the community and the pastor, making it possible for a congregation to veer far from their guiding principles or to breed greed and corruption among its leaders. It is possible that a church so deeply in tune to the needs of congregants will adjust as the community evolves and changes. But with so much power placed directly in the hands of the people and the pastor, can anyone entirely trust what they will do with it? That is a question upon which the Emergent Church movement itself needs to meditate.

Solomon's Porch has captured what my generation, the Echo Generation, is looking for: decentralization of power, casual atmosphere, and faith based on conversation and action rather than on dogma and sermons. The casual atmosphere is designed to make worshippers feel welcome and at ease. However, there is certainly a fine line to consider. How casual is too casual? What makes Solomon's Porch a church and not just a community lounge? There are no clear answers to these questions, but they are important for religious communities to consider. Is it the individual faith community that defines what is sacred? If a space is sacred to some, is it possible to find inspiration that can unleash the sacred in all? F&F

Ellen Fisher is an undergraduate student in the Religious Studies department at the University of Minnesota, focusing her studies on social justice within the Judeo-Christian tradition. Upon graduation next spring, Fisher plans to continue her religious studies education in a Master of Divinity program.

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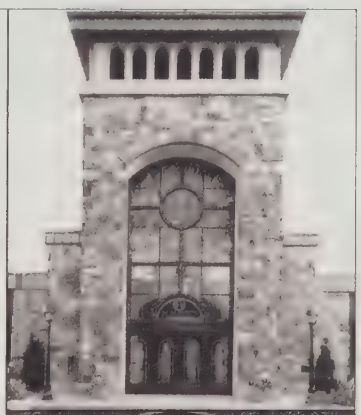


a hindu temple in america

a place for the faithful in the california desert » by cyrus subawalla

Aerial view of temple complex.

The Hindu philosophy and religion are followed by the majority of people in India. The faith is so ancient, complex, and profound that it has laid foundations for and provided precepts to numerous other faiths including, ironically, even those that broke away from the Hindu tradition, such as Buddhism and Jainism. Any explanation of the Hindu faith in a short essay such as this would do injustice to it and its followers. Rather, this article presents our design for a Hindu temple through which we explore certain questions about the form of a Hindu temple, and about the ritual that contributes to it.

Indian immigrant communities in the United States are vibrant, albeit small as compared to others, and they practice their faith with vigor and purpose. The Hindu population of the Antelope Valley, a suburban region near the City of Los Angeles, consists of roughly a half dozen immigrant groups who are devout practitioners of their faith. For years, these congregants have been worshiping out of temporarily rented spaces, a situation inadequate and inappropriate for the physical needs of the community and the sanctity of their worship. Fortunately, a visionary cardiologist approached our firm with a proposal to create a permanent sanctuary, and a core group of other philanthropic doctors and community leaders in the area have come together to transform this collective vision into reality.

The clients requested a temple dedicated primarily to Lord Vishnu, one of the prime deities of the Hindu tradition and the Supreme God of the Vaishnavite sect. They also requested additional shrines (chapels) for six to eight other deities of the Hindu pantheon as decided upon by the community. The end result will be a traditionalist temple of northern and southern Indian confluence, placed behind modernist support facilities designed to inspire younger generations to fervent worship. As with other non-Christian immigrant groups, the smaller Hindu communities attempt to instruct their young in Hinduism, without necessarily having the support of the social, linguistic, and cultural context and environment of India. Hence, our approach had to envision a place that would encourage future generations to explore the faith via the medium of design.

Having reviewed numerous prototypes, our office chose to design the main temple Shikhara (spire from the stepped entablature to the finial) after the pattern of one found in the Kangra district of the state of Himachal Pradesh, in northern India. The reason we begin our discussion with a temple spire is because it is perhaps the singular most iconic feature of a Hindu temple. The selection pays homage to the cultural attribution of Kangra as a birthplace of Hinduism, noting that the Shikharaof the Temple at Kangra is also one of the few Indian temples that successfully conjoin the traditions of Vishnu and Shiva worship. (For readers completely alien to the Hindu tradition, the trilogy is based around three manifestations of the same God, namely Vishnu the Preserver, Shiva the Destroyer, and Brahma the Creator. These deities are then said to have manifested themselves in numerous other gods and goddesses of the Hindu pantheon and are known by different

View of entrance doorway and portico, from east.

names in different parts of India.) This style of temple is also appropriate as a geographically synthetic typology, given that similar examples can be found in various regions of India.

Similar to a Christian church's composition, the Hindu temple is comprised of a few key elements. More often than not, in Hindu temples, the prime deity faces east, even though facing other directions may be acceptable. Thus, our journey begins in the east and progresses toward the deity in the west, with the pilgrim facing the sanctum sanctorum at all times *(see page 16)*.

The first architectural feature is the dwara (entrance doorway) which is often surmounted by either a raised, stepped entablature with or without a Shikhara (as seen in northern India) or by Gopurams (stepped trapezoidal spires seen in Hindu temples in southern India). These entrances are either crowned by gods or with devotees bowed in admiration of the gods. These embody a narrative from the Hindu liturgy, similar to the sculptured doorways in Gothic cathedrals. As in numerous other religions, the doorways herald the transition from fanum (profane) to the sacros (sacred). In Hindu temples, devotees leave their footwear on one side or immediately outside the main entry and vestibule; in our design we have created a semi-remote room, away from the main temple, for the specific purpose of ritual washing and shoe drop-off.

From here a pilgrim moves into a pillared Maha Mandapa (great assembly space), a multipurpose hallway that could serve as a place for communal worship, banqueting, and for sessions of religious study. This Maha-Mandapa is designed as a series of gateways/portals in lieu of a hypostyle hall. This permits an unhindered view of the main sanctum sanctorum. Also, the portals serve as metaphorical thresholds of increasing sanctity as one approaches the main temple. A modernist glass cube with a suspended roof under these portals is inserted to create a year-round structure that is both transparent and weatherproof. The transparency of the Maha-Mandapa thereby inspires the devotee to pass through each portal as part of a journey from the profane to the sacred, with a view of the main shrine and the Lord Vishnu residing within, all elevated on an additional plinth.

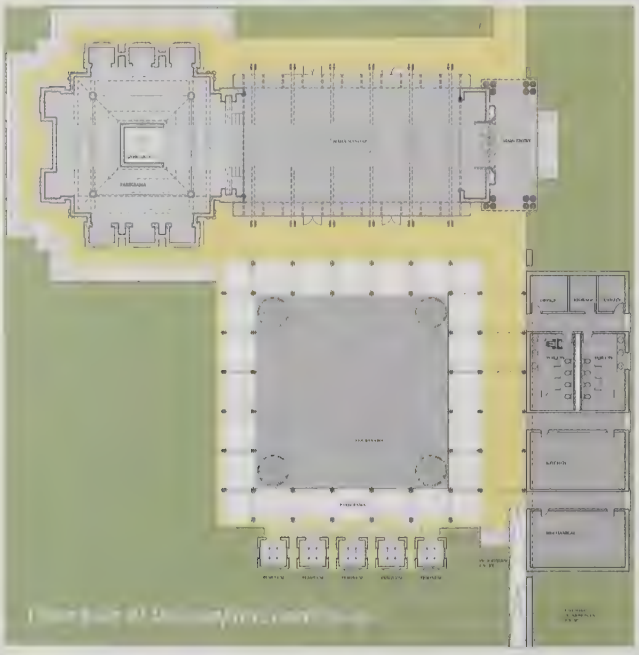
From this main hall, the devotee climbs a few more steps and enters the sanctum sanctorum where the statue of Lord Vishnu facing east is raised on a pedestal within a walled room called a garb griha (womb house). Around this garb griha is a parikrama (walkway), which allows devotees to ambulate around the statue. During this journey, they also pay their respects to other gods who reside within this sanctum in smaller conjoined shrines/templums of their own. (Examples similar to this are seen in cathedrals such as Chartres that have ambulatories with chapels for the saints.) The interiors of this main shrine have been designed as a series of inverted transverse beams, supporting the chatri (sacred umbrella often placed above where the gods reside). This is quite unlike the traditional load-bearing structure of a Hindu temple. After circumambulating the sacred shrines, devotees will back out of the

South elevation, showing view through the arcaded courtyard.

sanctum in bowed reverence to the gods. In this design, the congregants can exit through a side door to carry out a larger ambulation, visiting the shrines/chapels on the far side of a semi-internalized courtyard. As in numerous religions, a sense of pilgrimage is quintessential to the completion of the ritual and ceremony.

As mentioned earlier, the large exterior courtyard serves as a place for both sacred and secular function. Certain Hindu yagnias (ritual of sacrifice often associated with fire) are intentionally conducted outdoors where a larger congregation can worship as one. The courtyard is bound by a raised pergola-covered walkway, with independent chapels, offices, and main temple, accessible from the walkway on three sides. The fourth side is bound by a natural mound that existed in the landscape and that serves to seclude this courtyard from external view.

The design of this Hindu temple aims to achieve a harmonious balance between "the One" and "the Other," which is essential to an all-embracing faith such as Hinduism. Modern elements are delicately woven into the traditional, and provide space that encourages a conscientious re-enactment of ritual, yet gives congregants latitude to the use of these spaces for secular occasions. Most important, there is a place of repose, something fundamental to the journey of the Hindu faithful.



Cyrus Subawalla is a Principal of CSA Partners Ltd., based in Chicago and Mumbai.

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Mecca On The Plains

Chicago's varied mosques reflect changes on the country's religious landscape

By Paul D. Numrich

Mosque Maryam, Chicago, a former Greek Orthodox church.
Photo courtesy of Zol87

The Muslim Educational Cultural Center of America, whose acronym MECCA recalls the name of Islam's most sacred city, meets in a nondescript office building in suburban Chicago. Small signs at the entrances bid worshipers "Welcome to MECCA" and direct them to the prayer room. Passing motorists who do not know about the Center could not tell of its existence from the building's exterior.

This architectural obscurity will change if MECCA builds its proposed new facility in a nearby residential area. As MECCA's Web site shows (www.mecca-center.com), it will be a large structure with two domes and a minaret.

The proposal has aroused neighborhood opposition to its potential negative environmental impact, though the charge of anti-Muslim bias has been raised, and local government officials are named in a federal discrimination lawsuit over another proposed mosque. According to a 2010 report by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 35 mosques and Islamic centers across the United States faced similar controversies in the previous two years, including the Park51 proposal in Lower Manhattan.

Sometimes lost in the high profile public discourse about such cases are the architectural choices Muslims make in establishing a mosque in the United States, whether adapting an existing facility or constructing a new one. MECCA's current location is inconspicuous but its proposed site will be prominent. Why? What patterns can be discerned in the architectures of America's mosques? What do these patterns say about Muslim self-representation on America's religious landscape? What are the implications for relations between American Muslims and the larger society? The mosques of metropolitan Chicago offer a window to the nation in these regards.

Mosques on Chicago's Religious Landscape

Metropolitan Chicago's mosques have increased from just five before 1960 to the 91 that I verified through site visits and reliable sources in 2010. All of the pre-1960 mosques were located within the city limits; now nearly half (47 percent) are in the suburbs. A substantial majority of these mosques are immigrant-based, a direct result of the liberalization of U.S. immigration law beginning in 1965. The local institutional growth reflects a social stability found across the country: one source estimated a national total of nearly 1,900 mosques in 2010, a 57 percent increase since 2000.

Most of Chicago's mosques have adapted facilities that were not originally built for this purpose, such as former schools, businesses, residences, and Christian churches. Two mosques use space

Islamic Center of Naperville, suburban Chicago, a former Lutheran church.

Al-Hira Community Center, suburban Chicago, a former business, with signage that includes Islamic symbols.

in functioning churches. A typical interior adaptation orients the worshipers toward the northeast, the direction to Mecca from the U.S. following the curvature of the globe, according to the majority of Islamic scholars (minority opinions have it east or southeast). Exterior adaptations may prove more difficult. For instance, a group may wish to install a dome, one of the recurring elements of classical mosque architecture, but the structure may not be able to support it. Mosque Maryam, the headquarters of Minister Louis Farrakhan's Nation of Islam, surmounted the dome of its former Greek Orthodox church with a large crescent-moon-and-star symbol; the roofs of other churches-turned-mosques cannot be so readily transformed.

This raises the issue of whether a Muslim group wishes to make an obvious exterior statement of its Islamic identity in adapting a facility to serve as a mosque. Cost is not necessarily the determining factor here since inexpensive signage is always an option. More than half (56 percent) of the adapted facilities now serving as mosques in metropolitan Chicago have some exterior indication of their Islamic identity that would be identifiable to the average American passerby, such as signage with the words "Muslim," "Islamic," or "Mosque" (but not the less familiar Arabic "Masjid") or logos incorporating dome, minaret, or crescent-moon-and-star symbols into their design.

Other adapted facilities indicate their location or Islamic identity in ways decipherable only by their constituents or Muslims generally. One city mosque that meets in a large apartment complex with multiple entrances announces its location with a sign showing the pertinent address and an arrow, but no name. Another city mosque posts its acronym in large letters, but few non-constituents would understand it. One suburban mosque has a tiny sign saying simply "Masjid" and green peaked-arch window treatments. The color green, often associated with Islam, serves as an identifier that most non-Muslims would not recognize; more than half (53 percent) of all the mosques in metropolitan Chicago feature green on their exteriors.

Muslims have greater latitude in constructing a new mosque than in adapting an existing facility, although both internal factors, such as cost and competing visions of the project, and external factors, especially building codes and community dynamics, can influence a group's decision-making process. The first newly built mosque in the Chicago region opened in the early 1980s; by 2010 there were 21 (including two nearing completion), a remarkable 23 percent of the total number of local mosques, far exceeding the national rate of 8 percent. Fifteen of the 21 newly built Chicago mosques opened after 2001.

Nearly all of these new mosques (19 of 21) feature some exterior indication of Islamic identity that would be identifiable to the average American passerby, a much higher percentage than that of the adapted facilities. These include domes (or dome-like structures) and/or minarets, the most recognizable recurring elements of classical mosque architecture. The two exceptions provide interesting counterpoints to the pattern of proclaiming a newly built mosque's identity with obvious Islamic architectural features. One looks like an industrial or corporate facility and may have dispensed with a dome or a minaret because it sees itself as a multipurpose religious and social center rather than simply a mosque. The other initially planned to include a dome and a minaret, but now blends inconspicuously into its surroundings. One mosque leader told me that cost was a factor in foregoing the dome and minaret when the facility was built in the early 1990s, but "Maybe one day we will finish it."

All 21 newly built mosques are oriented toward Mecca. Twenty of them follow the majority Islamic scholarly opinion by having a northeast orientation, including two that creatively maximized the use of small city lots by constructing the exteriors on a north-south-east-west axis while orienting the interior prayer halls to the northeast. The lone exception faces southeast on the advice of a source at Cairo's Al-Azhar University in the 1970s.

Mosques on America's Religious Landscape

As Barbara Metcalf explains in the book, *Making Muslim Space in North America and Europe*, "mosques increasingly represent Islam in the West to Muslims and non-Muslims alike." What kind of Muslim self-representation can be seen in American mosques, as illustrated by the Chicago case? And what are the implications for relations between American Muslims and the larger society? Three points stand out.

First, the trend of establishing mosques is up rather than down or static, no trivial fact given the atmosphere of the country since 2001 and the recent economic downturn. The Muslim presence on the religious landscape has increased despite resistance in some quarters. This is the latest installment in an old American story, where religious voluntarism has always been vibrant, and today supports more than 300,000 congregations.

Second, a significant number of American mosques choose not to advertise their existence or identity through their exterior architecture. Various factors come into play here, from a simple lack of resources to a desire to avoid public controversy. Nefarious motives should not be assumed. As we know from reputable research, American Muslims on the whole are "Middle Class and Mostly Mainstream," to cite the subtitle of a 2007 Pew Research Center report. Moreover, as summarized in a 2010 report by scholars from Duke University and the University of North Carolina titled "Anti-Terror Lessons of Muslim-Americans," American Muslims generally "engage in self-policing by prohibiting radical sermons in their mosques and taking action against radical views expressed by outsiders or community members."

Third, most newly built mosques proclaim their Islamic identity in striking architectural ways, an important counter-trend to the aforementioned reticence. This bespeaks the civic self-confidence of those Muslim groups that can accomplish such a feat. Moreover, the geographic orientation of American Muslims is religiously significant. Comparable to Orthodox Christians facing the rising sun in anticipation of Christ's Second Coming, American Muslims face Mecca as their sacred center. Other Muslims across the globe face the same center from different directions, a powerful symbol of the ideal of Islamic unity in worshiping the one Creator.

Omar Khalidi of the Aga Khan Program in Islamic Architecture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology criticizes new mosque architecture that unthinkingly transplants traditional elements like domes and minarets because by standing out as an alien presence on the American landscape, these elements risk reinforcing Western stereotypes about the "otherness" of Islam. Khalidi favors reinterpretations of traditional Islamic elements or innovative mosque designs that respect America's "own deeply embedded historical and visual vocabulary," pointing out that "since Muslims are now part of the American population, these images [of mosques] become critical for cross-cultural communication" ("Approaches to Mosque Design in North America," in the book *Muslims on the Americanization Path?*). Most of the newly built mosques of metropolitan Chicago would not meet with Khalidi's approval, as more than

Photo courtesy of the author

The 'Masjid' sign and green window treatments on this suburban Chicago mosque are barely visible at a distance.

Photo courtesy of Frederick J. Nachman

Masjid Al-Faatir, Chicago, featuring a dome and two minarets.

The initial plans for this suburban Chicago mosque included a dome and a minaret, but cost factored into the decision to forego them.

Photo courtesy of the author

Prayer Center of Orland Park, suburban Chicago, modeled on the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem.

Photo courtesy Prayer Center of Orland Park

Saints Peter and Paul Ukrainian Orthodox Church, suburban Chicago, in Ukrainian Orthodox style.

Photo courtesy of Donna Nevels of d.nevels images

The Hindu Temple of Greater Chicago, suburban Chicago, Rama structure in south India style.

Photo reproduced from www.ArunShanbhag.com with permission, from http://bit.ly/ncZAWX

The Hindu Temple of Greater Chicago, suburban Chicago, Ganesha-Shiva-Durga structure in east central India style.

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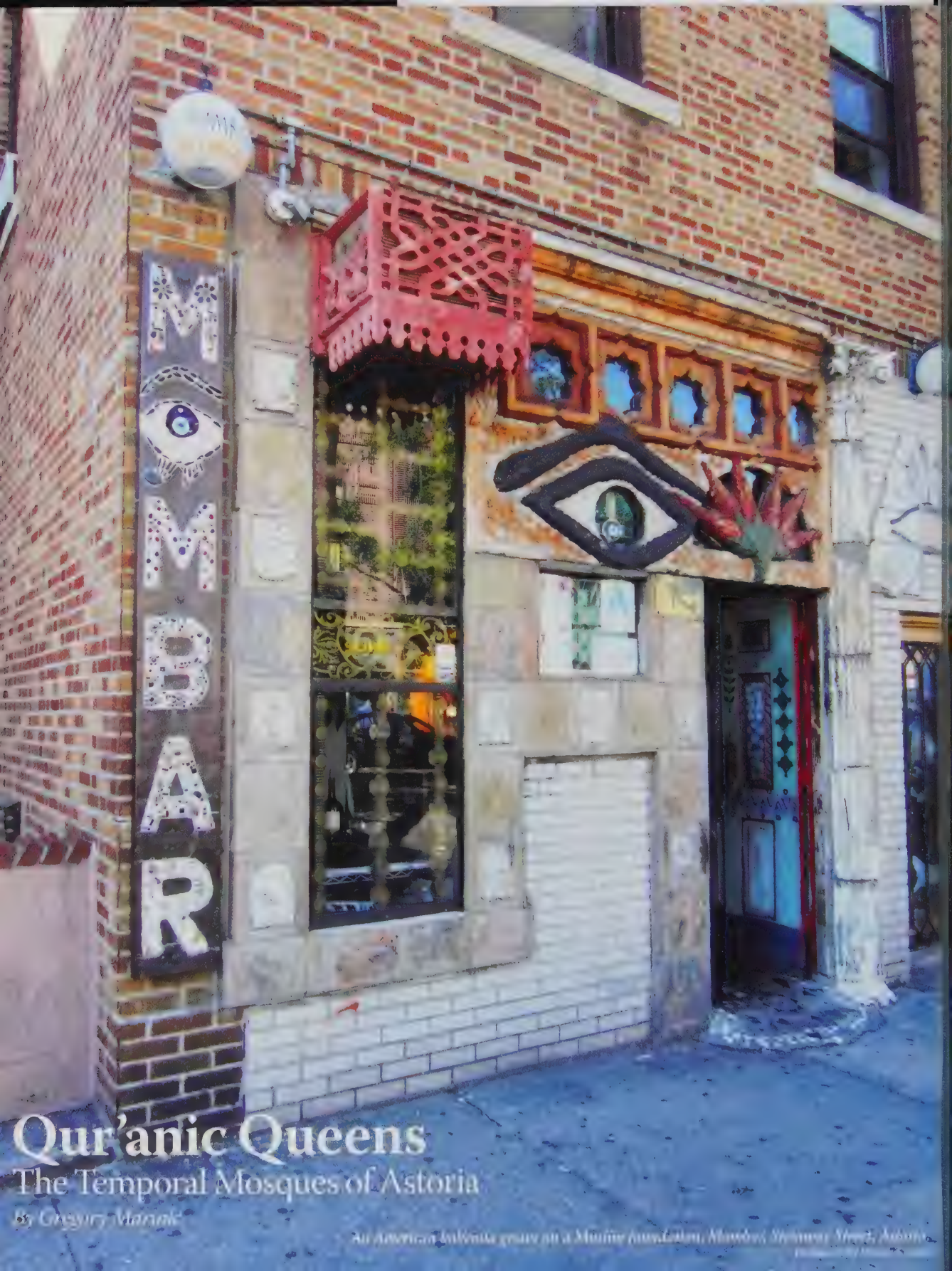
three-quarters of the total – and more than 85 percent of those built since 2001 – are transplanted designs.

As a scholar of American religions, I respectfully disagree with the suggestion that traditional mosque design is somehow more alien than other sacred architectures. The American religious landscape does not have an indigenous template, and features traditional transplants from ethnic and spiritual homelands around the world. A mosque modeled on the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem can be found not far from a church built on a Ukrainian Orthodox model and a Hindu temple complex that draws upon different regional styles of India. America's lively experiment with religious freedom has accommodated Islamic, Christian, Hindu, and other architectural styles that serve analogous sacred functions.

As a participant in cross-cultural communication, I also respectfully disagree with the implication that traditional Islamic design impedes understanding between American Muslims and their non-Muslim neighbors. Misunderstandings and tensions can arise where architecture is not an issue. How people interact with each other is far more important. A truism in interfaith circles is that the best dialogue occurs when the parties share who they are with each other.

Khalidi wants American mosques to be open and inviting to non-Muslims. Traditional architectural statements of Islamic identity are not inherently uninviting, any more than are other traditional sacred architectures. Both the builders and the beholders of American mosques invest domes, minarets, and crescent-moons-and-stars with meaning. They can – and do – engage each other in civil discourse about those meanings.

Paul D. Numrich teaches at the Theological Consortium of Greater Columbus, Ohio, as Associate Professor in the Snowden Chair for the Study of Religion and Interreligious Relations, Methodist Theological School in Ohio. He is the author of numerous books on the immigrant religious experience.



Qur'anic Queens

The Temporal Mosques of Astoria

By Gregory Maniak

An American folkmetic grave on a Muslim foundation, Mombar, Steinway Street, Astoria.

Historical narratives of the United States are riddled with omissions. Our collective memory of the huddled masses that passed through Ellis Island is generally selective. Certainly, the vast majority of those immigrants migrated from Southern and Eastern Europe in successive waves, and correspondingly settled in the industrial urban areas of the Northeast and Midwest. That part of the memory forms an accepted consciousness, and thus, has been fully integrated into a common contemporary American identity. However, people from the Arabic-speaking world were also part of earlier flows. By the late 1800s, they began migrating to the U.S. in significant numbers and although most were Christians, Muslims were also among the early migrants from the Levant and Southeastern Europe.[1] Unlike larger immigrant groups that were drawn to cities, these immigrants settled more uniformly throughout the country and entered the merchant classes in greater numbers. They worked in factories, opened grocery stores, and participated in trading. Additionally, Islam was one of the early religions practiced by African Americans under slavery. Yet these early Muslim Americans are rarely viewed as part of the historical narrative of established immigrant communities in the U.S. Likewise, they are seldom considered in the way chosen to imagine their nation by most Americans, who are arguably biased by a perceived religious "otherness."

It can be argued that Muslims exist in the American consciousness as primarily overseas and foreign. Considered outsiders, they are typically viewed through a highly politicized lens linked to American engagement in the Arab and Muslim worlds. This filter has been consistently adversarial. Tied to a narrow perspective that fuels animosity between philosophies, countries, peoples, and ultimately religions, an "American Muslim" identity is consistently portrayed as a seemingly incongruous notion. Apart from the general perception of "foreignness," overriding dialogues have largely delegitimized their aspirations, whether they are regional, national, cultural, or religious. These Americans, as well as their religion, are generally treated as objects of curiosity rather than as an integral part of the nation's inherent multicultural diversity.

Shifting: Further South and East

The 1965 Immigration Act led to increased flows to the U.S. from non-European nations. Along with new immigrants from Latin America and Asia, countries with significant Muslim populations were no exception. Ellis Island, the historical gateway for millions of immigrants to the U.S., closed as an inspection station in 1954.[2] Immigrant processing shifted to various facilities, including the newly constructed Idlewild Airport (now John F. Kennedy International) in Queens. For many new Muslim immigrants entering the U.S., Queens was not only their primary gateway, but was the borough where they stayed. Today, Queens County has been transformed into the most culturally and ethnically diverse jurisdiction in the U.S.[3] Consequently, Queens has evolved into an increasingly dense and decidedly urban place, where more than 150 languages are spoken in communities served by their own social organizations, newspapers, and radio stations. This diversity is correspondingly reflected in houses of worship. Joining a mix that was predominantly Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Jewish, and Lutheran, Buddhist shrines, Hindu temples, Sufi mandirs, and Islamic mosques have gradually carved out peripheral and interstitial spaces within an established religious landscape.

During the 1960s, the number of mosques in New York began to increase significantly. Before 1970 there were fewer than ten mosques in New York City.[4] Today, there are more than a hundred Islamic mosques, shrines, and cultural centers throughout the five boroughs, with the highest concentration in Queens.[5] In the 1960s, there was very little existing spiritual infrastructure available to Muslim immigrants. This fact sets Muslims apart from newly arrived immigrants of the Protestant, Roman Catholic, Jewish, or Orthodox Christian traditions. Throughout Queens, contemporary immigrants continue to group along cultural, religious, and ethnic lines. Ecuadorians, for instance, follow Colombians. Colombians grouped near Argentines and Argentines settled near Spaniards. Spaniards fleeing Franco's Spain joined established Italian and Irish neighborhoods. These communities generally share a predominantly Roman Catholic faith and thus, have tended to support a common network of churches, schools, credit organizations, and social clubs. Muslim Americans in Queens have generally settled closer to established Lebanese and Greek communities. However, previous waves of Lebanese and Greeks (including Greek Egyptians), established Christian churches, schools, and benevolent societies. Unable to plug into institutions founded by previous waves with a shared tradition, Muslims have had to determine an alternative strategy. Newly arrived communities began carving out spaces within an already fully built urban landscape that offered few affordable options for those with modest resources. And so, mosques in Queens most typically trace their origins to ephemeral environments. Houses, apartments, and storefronts variously have served the needs of growing and transient populations. These transitional spaces support spiritual, but also social and political, needs. Over time, mosques have grown from modest basement prayer halls within existing buildings to independent, ground-up, architect-designed buildings.

Sacred Storefronts and Mobile Masjids

In Islam, the function of the mosque is both spiritual and temporal. The English word mosque emerged from the corrupted pronunciation of masjid, which refers to "a place of prostration" in Egyptian Arabic. For the Muslim community, the storefront mosque provides a flexible political, cultural, and social mechanism for an inherently diverse

Hookah culture, Steinway Street, Astoria.

Photograph by Miriam Cazares

Photograph by Miriam Cazares

Islam Fashion shop, Steinway Street, Astoria.

Photograph by Gregory Marinic

Astoria Islamic Center, 27th Street, Astoria.

community. The storefront mosque falls into the category of non-pedigreed architecture, defined by its vernacular, spontaneous, anonymous, and essentially undocumented development.[6] Like other American storefront churches and synagogues, Muslim re-usage requires quintessentially urban building types: existing commercial street storefronts and warehouses. Typically first-floor spaces facing onto the street, storefronts in the neighborhoods of Astoria, Woodside, Jackson Heights, and Corona are characterized by their public appearance, large display windows, and direct access. As a vernacular typology, the storefront mosque falls into a quotidian architecture that develops informally. And so, while intentional attempts to "legitimize" storefront mosques into grounded environments linked to conventional historical iconography, such places tend to blend seamlessly into the urban fabric and street life of their locales.

As a temporal typology, the storefront mosque vernacular in Astoria remains largely undocumented; however, it simultaneously reveals and creates identities for Muslims within a dense and diverse urban fabric. There are at least ten mosques in Astoria, several Arabic newspapers, and a vibrant cultural and culinary scene that attracts people from beyond the neighborhood. Such institutions challenge the prevailing image of Islam as an alien culture in America. Blending into their adjacencies, storefront mosques accept and adapt to the idiosyncrasies of an existing building culture.

Al-Imam Mosque: Mother of Astoria's Storefront Masjids

Little Egypt is a district located along Steinway Street in north Astoria. Named for the famous German family that opened a neighborhood piano factory in the 1870s, Steinway has witnessed successive waves of change and assimilation.[7] Since the 1960s, the Egyptian community has established a significant attachment to the area. With relaxed immigration restrictions and the increasing repressiveness of political regimes in Egypt, many Egyptians emigrating to the U.S. settled in Astoria. Early immigrants established businesses and community organizations along Steinway Street and its environs. Over the past two decades, the northern segment of the street has been transformed into a thoroughly multicultural, but predominantly Muslim, community. Little Egypt is the most vibrant and eclectic neighborhood in Astoria, a notably cosmopolitan and 24-hour place served by several cafés, grocery stores, community centers, and masjids. Bearded young men and hijab-clad women attending religious services share Steinway Street with hipsters and curious Manhattan day-trippers in search of hookah cafés.

Located at the heart of the district, the Al-Imam Mosque may be considered Astoria's "old-guard" storefront masjid. Translated from "the faith" in Arabic, Al-Imam is the largest Muslim sacred space in the neighborhood. On Fridays, hundreds of North African, Middle Eastern, and South Asian men converge on the mosque for worship. Peak prayer times at the popular and central mosque require some worshippers to find space for their prayer mats on the sidewalk. With the faithful variously adorned in white robes, knit skullcaps, or ordinary street clothes, the scene is an indicator of the communal yet exceptionally diverse Muslim community. Occupying a true storefront in a midblock site, Al-Imam's adjusted façade presents a pair of ornately "filigreed" gold-painted double doors that welcome only male congregants to the main prayer room. To the left of this entrance is a small door that leads to the women's prayer room. Inside the mosque, separate male and female wudu rooms allow congregants to ritually wash and purify themselves before reading the Qur'an or praying.

Al-Imam's façade has been redesigned into a layman's interpretation of a Moorish arched arcade. Clearly nonpedigreed, Al-Imam expresses an architectural language more akin to conventional street retail façade renovations

than to the appearance of an established place of worship. Although Al-Imam is quintessentially defined by the public perception of its "skin," it attempts to evoke the more lasting spirit of "Old World" masjid. In a nod to cost-effectiveness, gold paint is substituted for gold leaf and low-relief façade articulations take the place of arches. Yet the contradictory message of this storefront typology endures. It is inherently temporary: it can be changed and most likely will.

Masjid El-Ber: Flexible Purposes

Masjid El-Ber, meaning "piety and righteousness," is a Sunni congregation offering services in Arabic. The mosque was established in Astoria in the late 1980s and has occupied the same space since its inception. Masjid El-Ber is supported by a growing, predominantly Egyptian and Bengali membership. Adapted into a corner storefront in the heart of an increasingly South Asian neighborhood, the façade has been resurfaced with an abstract black and white granite interpretation of traditional Islamic patterns. Decidedly secular back-lighted signage identifies the mosque. Beyond the threshold, homemade posted placards request worshippers to observe various religious obligations. A built-in shoe stall offers a place to sort footwear, while complying with fire egress regulations. The main prayer hall, a simple carpeted two-tone green space ventilated with oscillating fans, is located on the first floor. Striations within the wall-to-wall carpet direct worshippers to Mecca. The minbar, or pulpit, sits in a corner and may be repositioned to allow the space to be used for other purposes. The interior environment of Masjid El-Ber is quiet, calm, and unpretentious. The discernible lack of pretense is an overriding theme in the storefront mosques of Astoria, perhaps most evident here. These mosques are welcoming places; they are unguarded and accessible, and in a sense, typically evoke associations more akin to an extended domestic environment rather than to a formal place of worship.

Spatial flexibility is reflected in Masjid El Ber's ability to serve broader community needs. The symbolic relationship of religion to food in Islam is revealed in pairings of grocery stores and prayer halls in Astoria. Masjid El-Ber is a clear example of the symbiotic and complementary roles these activities afford; storefronts offer a ready-made, plug-in architecture that flexibly addresses both needs. The adjacent El-Ber Grocery stocks Egyptian and South Asian groceries, halal meats, Mediterranean olives, and cheeses as if it were an extension of the mosque itself.

Photograph by Miriam Cazares

Masjid Al-Iman on Steinway Street in central Astoria.

Photograph by Tito Mesnas

Masjid El-Ber and the adjacent El-Ber Grocery Store, Astoria.

Particularly useful during Ramadan, the grocery store supports social activities at the mosque, along with the extended food needs of other Mediterranean communities residing in the neighborhood.

Masjid Al-Hikmah: Incrementally Real

In the early 1980s, a group of Indonesians in Astoria began holding a monthly pengajian, a religious gathering at which Islam is discussed. Early meetings were held in apartments or houses, but as the number of participants grew, the need for a larger permanent space became apparent. The group petitioned the Indonesian Consulate General in Manhattan to hold their monthly meetings at the consulate until the community was able to establish their own independent mosque.[8] In 1989, the community founded a tax-exempt organization to collect funding. After several years of raising money from various sources, including donations from the Indonesian government and prominent Indonesian businesses, a former chemical warehouse was purchased in eastern Astoria for $350,000.[9] The building was renovated and opened for services on the 50th anniversary of Indonesian Independence as Masjid Al-Hikmah, or "The Widsom Mosque." Since its inception in 1995, Masjid Al-Hikmah has made considerable efforts to merge with the surrounding neighborhood and the larger non-Muslim community. An example of this

Masjid Al-Hikmah, "Contractor Mediterranean," Astoria.

Photograph by Gregory Marinic

Minarets and streetlights, Masjid Al-Hikmah, Astoria.

Photograph by Tito Mesias

Heading to the Team Taxi Fleet Systems Lot, Astoria.

Photograph by Gregory Marinic

approach is the Indonesian Bazaar. Once a month, the mosque's back lot is transformed into a Jakarta-inspired food emporium, serving satays, noodles, and numerous varieties of Indonesian street-hawker fare. In this sense, Al-Hikmah has fostered a relationship with Astorians akin to the numerous annual Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox church festivals in the neighborhood.

Masjid Al-Hikmah is one of the more established storefront mosques in Astoria and it attempts to present a formal image of an independent building. Occupying half of a city block and a corner site, this former warehouse has been adjusted with various "Islamic" vernacular interventions. "Contractor Mediterranean" may best describe the various surface applications that have transformed a quintessentially utilitarian building into an Islamic decorated shed. Here, the notion of architecture without architects is expressed in a communal effort undertaken by various neighborhood stakeholders. Produced by the spontaneous and continuing activity of people with distinct yet common memories, Masjid Al-Hikmah expresses the various layers of Astoria's building and human culture over time. As unschooled builders tap their own sources for inspiration, Masjid Al-Hikmah visually communicates the experience of a new immigrant culture blended into a previous wave. The mosque tells this story by incorporating a storybook minaret and dome, and applied "Roman" pilasters and arches. Such architecture can easily be dismissed as accidental or unimportant. But it may also be considered a valuable tool that transmits a culture "of and by the people" to future generations in a new place.

Team Taxi Prayer Room: Spirituality-on-the-Move

New York City's taxi infrastructure is supported primarily by immigrant men, with a significant population hailing from the Muslim communities of South Asia. Extending beyond drivers, an entire network of service stations, mechanic shops, convenience stores, restaurants, and on-the-go communal spaces supports a diverse workforce and a temperamental rolling stock. Muslim tradition requires prayer five times a day. This organized prayer, called salah, is performed by Muslims around the world praying at the same time and in the same way. The ritual can be performed anywhere. The unpredictable daily schedule of New York City taxi drivers requires a special strategy for the devout Muslim. For some, a prayer mat equipped with a Mecca-directed compass is a flexible option. Others rely on designated prayer spaces found within restaurants that cater to the community. Responding to religious needs, the Team Taxi Prayer Room serves yellow cab drivers spiritual space at their Astoria maintenance facility.

Lying in the shadow of the elevated Q subway line, the Team Taxi Prayer Room occupies a heated and air-conditioned trailer in the fleet's service facility lot. Combining car maintenance and spiritual rituals, it addresses two taxi driver-specific needs. As an adapted sacred environment, the prayer room offers an understated and utilitarian presence amidst rows of taxis and other outbuildings. Its interior provides a private and contemplative environment for prayer and meditation. Here, prayer rugs and Islamic calendars are the only sacred symbols in an otherwise completely unadorned environment. Yet it is the anonymity of the structure that is most compelling. As an architectural metaphor, the Team Taxi Prayer Room suggests deeper readings of the place of Islam in the post-9/11 U.S. Despite the value of their contributions, taxi drivers, and arguably to a greater extent Muslim Americans in general, remain mostly sidelined in the broader story of America. The Team Taxi Prayer Room demonstrates a larger invisibility and absence from the national conversation. This status tends to diminish only in moments of national tension. By reacting to such sentiments architecturally, a communal desire for anonymity is manifested in the visual representation of a most sacred space. Although made entirely in good faith, there is danger in such a response. Within a vacuum of invisibility resulting from relations between the U.S. and the Muslim world, a shadow of collective anxiety is cast upon millions of Americans. This notion is quietly conveyed by the Team Taxi Prayer Room. It is a purposely hidden sacred space—open and welcoming, yet hidden.

Reflecting

Considering simultaneously anthropological and architectural influences, Astoria's storefront mosques are a complex phenomenon for which a simple explanation will not suffice. Resulting from previously acquired environmental or cultural traditions of their sponsors, along with an applied architectural language tied to the vernacular customs and building trades of Astoria, these transitional interventions vary tremendously. Masjid Al-Hikmah, for example, demonstrates the phased establishment of a storefront mosque, initially formed by a loosely connected group that used a private home, then a donated space, and ultimately an actual storefront for its congregation. In the case of Al-Hikmah, an acquired warehouse has been transformed into a virtually unrecognizable and independent mosque. Alternatively, some contemporary Muslim typologies approach sacred space from a private and blurred perspective. The Team Taxi Prayer Room, for example, employs a reconditioned mobile trailer as a taxi lot outbuilding to address the simple devotional needs of its users. This under-the-radar approach acts anonymously, as either a conscious or an unintended response.

Early-20th-century Roman Catholic churches and Jewish synagogues in the U.S. mixed congregants from dramatically varied places of origin. Similarly, Astoria's mosques blend disparate Muslim identities into quintessentially American hybrids. Moreover, the intrafaith diversity that Roman Catholic European immigrants to the U.S. confronted in 1910, for example, almost pales in comparison to the diversity encountered by 21st-century Muslims. Storefront mosques offer these so-called "new" Americans—Bosnians, Egyptians, Indonesians, Moroccans, Persians, South Asians, Tunisians, Turks, and Yemenis—a shared place to find common ground as they build alternative Muslim identities in America. The storefront quality of their places of worship affords a direct economic impact on the neighborhoods they serve as well. Yemeni grocery stores, Indian newsstands, Lebanese coffee shops, Afghani tea houses, and Egyptian cafés cluster near the mosques, catering to the specific tastes and needs of congregants. These businesses create a bridge between people on the "inside" and on the "outside," as creative communities converge on "cool" and "bohemian" places that provide economic, ethnic, and cultural diversity, as well as enhanced tolerance.

The U.S. has long been considered a nation of immigrants, but some communities, including Muslims, have encountered considerably greater difficulty than others in weaving themselves into the American fabric. Astoria's temporal Muslim typologies, from storefronts to mobile mosques, have begun to address integration from the ground up. By reaching out to connect with their communities in both active and passive ways, the support networks they create attempt to re-territorialize a sense of Muslim tradition in America, while actively contributing to a shared American Dream.

Photograph by Gregory Marinic

Exterior of the Team Taxi Prayer Room, Astoria.

Photograph by Gregory Marinic

Interior of the Team Taxi Prayer Room, Astoria.

Gregory Marinic is a professor of architecture at the University of Houston and editor of the International Journal of the Arts in Society. He thanks members of the Masjid Al-Iman, Masjid El-Ber, Masjid Al-Hikma, and Team Taxi Fleet Systems for allowing access to their sacred spaces, as well as an opportunity to gain personal insight into their communities. He also thanks Tito Mesias and Miriam Cazares for graciously offering their assistance with on-site field research and digital documentation.

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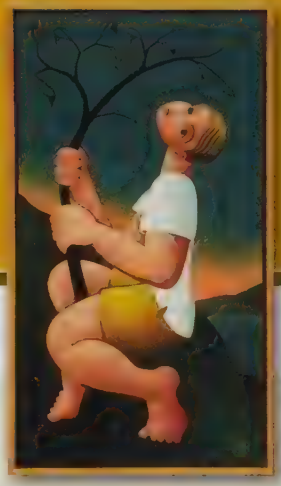

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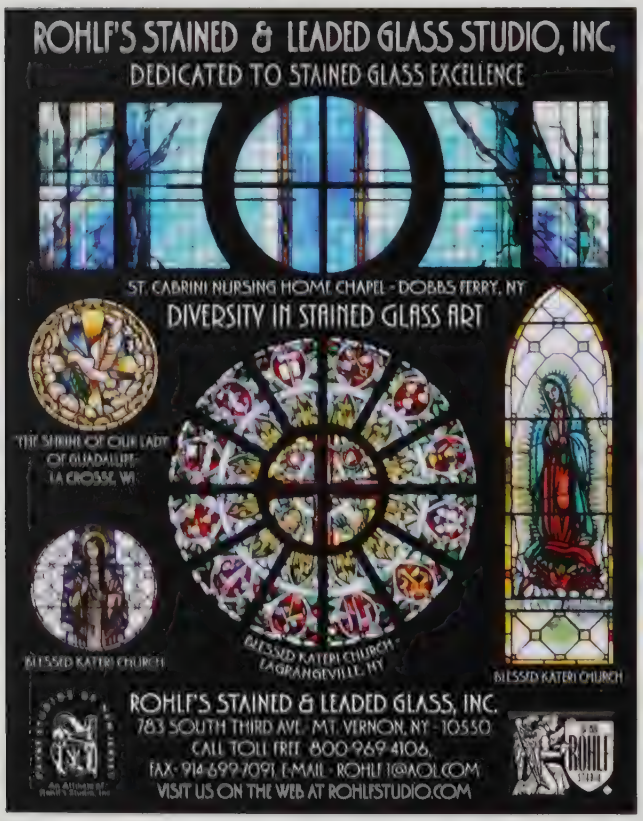
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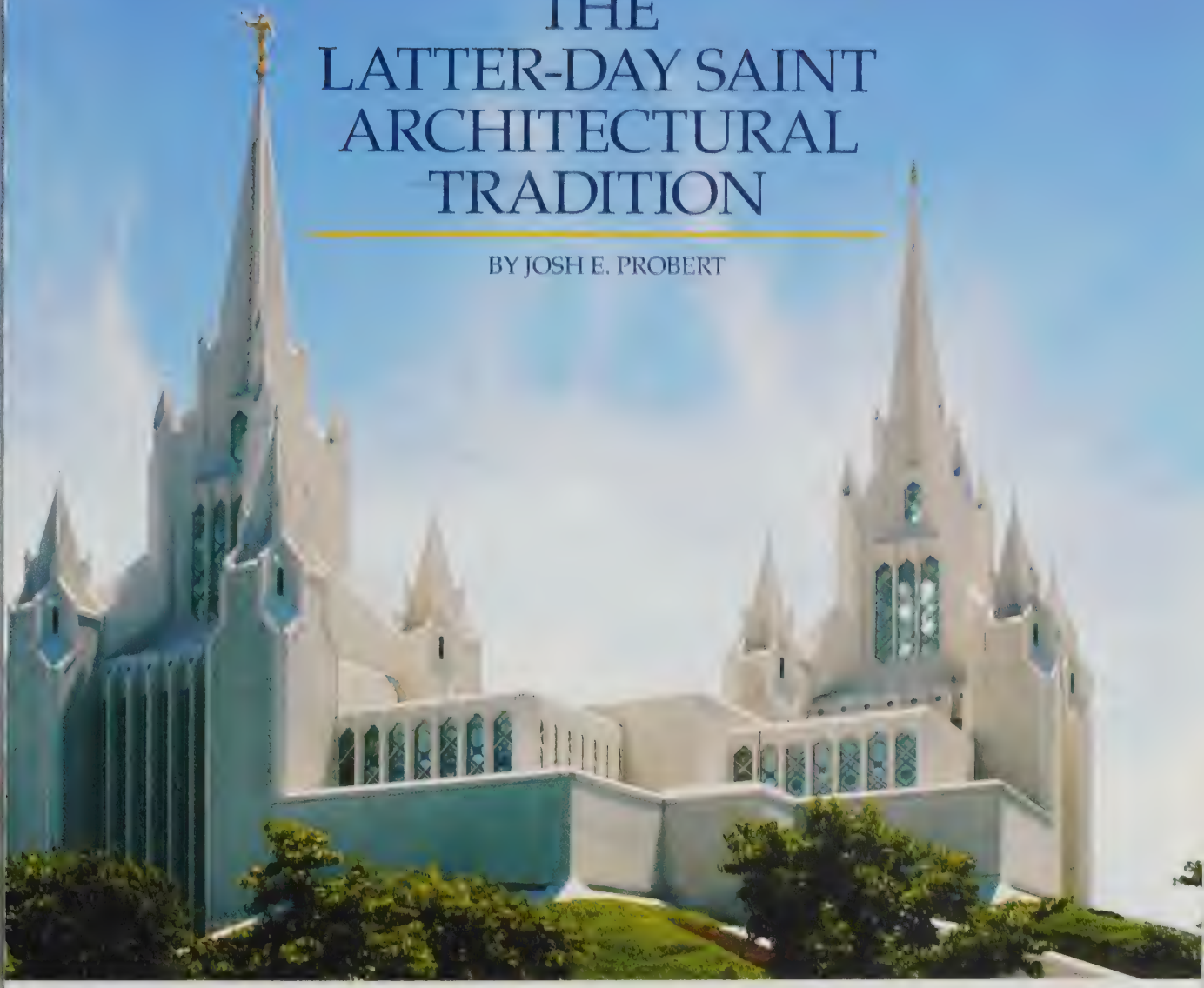
THE LATTER-DAY SAINT ARCHITECTURAL TRADITION

BY JOSH E. PROBERT



San Diego, California, temple.

Courtesy of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, ©Intellectual Reserve

The ebb and flow of murals, like other aspects of design, reveals a pragmatic malleability throughout the Mormon architectural tradition. Its structures are architectural solutions to the paradoxical ideologies that underlie its material culture. Early Latter-day Saints originated largely from low-church backgrounds with Calvinistic predilections towards the sacred and the profane. Joseph Smith complicated this mindset when he reintroduced the idea of temple into Christianity. He lauded the products of man's creation and embraced the arts in the service of worship. Brigham Young continued this ideology.

The early decisions of Smith and Young regarding art created a perpetual tension that Latter-day Saints continue to negotiate—a suspicion of materially mediated worship coupled with a full embrace of it. These two categories hold in tension the paradoxical moorings of Mormon materialism, with places of assembly acting as heirs to the evangelical world of Jacksonian America, and with the temples acting as the heirs of Smith's project to create holy places and rites that involved sound, touch, smell, gesture, and procession.

The nomenclature of Latter-day Saint architecture can be confusing to those not immersed in the faith. Mormons have an insider discourse that includes buildings called tabernacles, temples, and stake centers; spaces called sealing rooms, ordinance rooms, and high council rooms; and meetings called stake conferences, solemn assemblies, and fire sides. The design and naming of these forms and functions has been a dynamic, changing process over the past two centuries, with old forms phasing out, new forms phasing in, and retained ones being readapted to new uses. Today, the church generally has two divisions of religious architecture: places of assembly and temples. One is passive. The other is active. One is low church. The other is high church.

Places of Assembly

Latter-day Saints officially call their weekly places of assembly meetinghouses, a holdover from American Calvinism. Yet the buildings are also referred to as churches, and the central meeting hall a chapel, following the changes in early-19-century Protestant discourse. The

Left, from top:

New solar-powered meetinghouse in Farmington, Utah.
Temple Square in Salt Lake City, Utah.
'Evening No. 2' by artist Ron Richmond, oil on canvas, 40" x 60", 2011.

interiors and exteriors of these utilitarian buildings are replicated worldwide, creating a familiar space for Mormons wherever they travel. The Church is currently embracing sustainable architecture in these buildings. A new meetinghouse in Farmington, Utah, for example, features enough solar panels to fully power the building, saving $6,000 annually in energy costs.

The absence of the cross atop buildings is a unique characteristic of Mormon iconography today, but would not have been in the early 19th century, as many Protestant meetinghouses did not have them either. While most Protestants reintroduced the use of the cross on and inside their worship spaces during the 19th century, Latter-day Saints retained the Reformation-inspired aversion. The visual imagery in church meetinghouses is limited to a predictable number of standardized, framed prints of narrative illustration; and these images are allowed only in hallways and classrooms. These images create a homogenized visual culture that has more in common with Evangelical Protestantism than it does with eitherCatholic or Orthodox traditions.

The current lack of imagery stands in contrast to the 19th- and early-20th-century chapels that were often decorated with paintings, portraits, and stained glass windows. The First Vision of Joseph Smith in the spring of 1820 was the most popular theme, as it had become the foundational narrative of Mormonism. Despite the limited number of headquarters-authorized images in church-owned buildings, a vibrant Mormon art community does exist. Artists such as Ron Richmond of Manti, Utah, exhibit work in the museums of the church and Brigham Young University, as well as in non-LDS museums and galleries worldwide. His "Evening (No. 2)", for example, is a visual meditation on the night before Gethsemane that collapses the multiple themes of the Last Supper, the Passion, the entombment, and the resurrection into a mystically unified one—a unity signified by the cosmic halo surrounding the chair.

Although the Latter-day Saints today construct meetinghouses throughout the world, they originally had a tradition of building larger places of assembly in the Intermountain West called tabernacles. The most famous of these is the Tabernacle on Temple Square, constructed from 1864 to 1867. The structure followed evangelical precedents, such as Charles Finney's Broadway Tabernacle (1836), of a large oval meetinghouse with music hall seating, a pulpit, and a pipe organ with towering display pipes. Famous for its eponymous choir, remarkable acoustics, and faux-painted marble columns and pine benches, the Tabernacle's form followed its function. Thus Frank Lloyd Wright called it "one of the architectural masterpieces of the country and perhaps the world."

To supplement the Tabernacle's limited capacity for semi-annual, Church-wide conferences, the Church constructed a massive meeting hall called the Conference Center from 1997 to 2000. The architectural firm Zimmer Gunsul Frasca Partnership designed the center, and Auerbach & Associates of San Francisco carried out the architectural lighting and the design for a small theater adjacent to the main meeting hall. The grand hall is similar in design to contemporary megachurches, but is much more "mega" in scale than most. While the almost-identical Willow Creek Church worship center in suburban Chicago (2004) seats 7,095, the Conference Center seats 21,200 and covers 1.4 million square feet. The pulpit contains the only iconography and possesses both symbolic and sentimental meaning. Fetzer Architectural Woodwork in Salt Lake City created the pulpit out of a black walnut tree that the highly popular church president Gordon B. Hinckley had planted in his backyard 36 years earlier. The firm carved three beehives across that front of the pulpit, as the beehive has been a symbol of Mormon communitarianism since the 1840s.

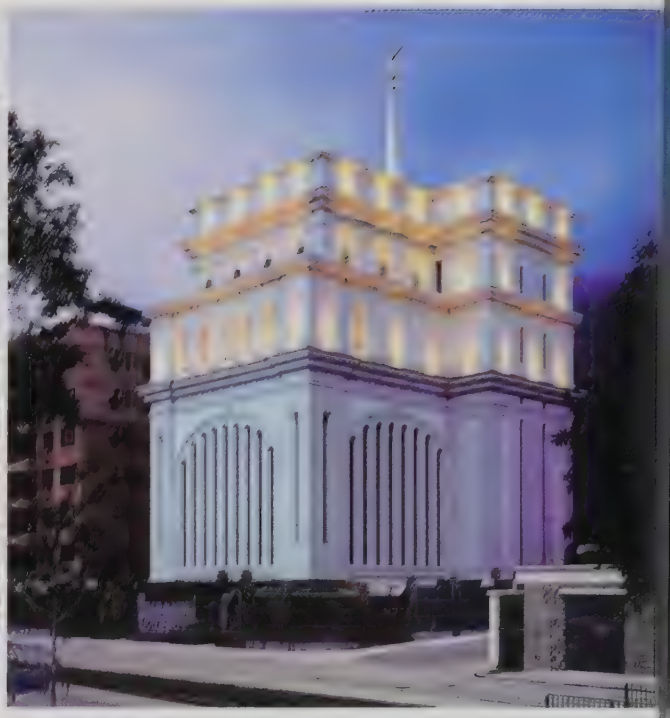
The roof contains three acres of landscaping, which visitors are free to experience. Landscape designers drew from a palette of indigenous species, including 21 native grasses, to blend the roof with the surrounding desert landscape and to connect the 21st-century structure to the original Mormon settlers' view of the landscape in 1847—a theme echoed in the groundbreaking for the building, which was on the 150th anniversary of the entry of Brigham Young and the vanguard company of pioneers into the Salt Lake Valley.

Conference Center Auditorium.

Reproduction of Bertel Thorvaldsen's Christus, in the conference center hallway.

Photos on this page courtesy of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. ©Intellectual Reserve

Kirtland Temple in Kirtland, Ohio, circa 1870



Hong Kong temple

The temples of today are structures wherein Latter-day Saints perform rituals they believe necessary for salvation and for the exaltation of both the living and the dead, including baptism for the dead. Not open to the public like places of assembly, temples are reserved for Latter-day Saints who are found worthy by priesthood leaders. While approximately 20 temples were in operation worldwide during much of the 20th century, today there are 134 operating throughout the world, with 10 under construction and 16 more announced. The earliest Mormon temple, located in Kirtland, Ohio, was a multipurpose meetinghouse dedicated in 1836 that accommodated activities ranging from Sunday services and priesthood meetings to schools and public lectures. The building functioned and looked like an Evangelical Protestant meeting house with a neo-Gothic exterior, a spare interior with box pews, and woodwork designs borrowed from Asher Benjamin's *American Builder's Companion* (1806). Yet it was different.

The Saints ascribed a holiness to the Kirtland Temple that Calvinists would have found alarming. The stone plaque above the doorway read, "The House of the Lord," and the Saints interpreted it literally. They constructed another of these multipurpose temples in Nauvoo, Illinois, the center of Mormon gathering from 1839 to 1846. Under duress, the Latter-day Saints abandoned this temple along with other belongings and began their journey to the Rocky Mountains of what was then northern Mexico. Arsonists set fire to the Nauvoo Temple in 1848, and a tornado leveled the remains. Since then, the Saints have not been forced to leave any of their temples behind and are now largely viewed not as 19th-century eccentrics or even anathema, but as a quintessentially American people.

The design vocabulary of the Nauvoo Temple made a 20th-century reappearance in the Hong Kong Temple, the first of the Church's new

Baptistery and baptismal font at San Salvador Temple, in El Salvador, Ecuador.

temples that are relegated to certain floors of a multistory building. The six-story structure, dedicated in 1996, also contains mission offices, apartments, and a chapel. The multipurpose building was a solution to expensive real estate and the lack of unused property in an urban center that the church repeated in New York City in 2004.

In contrast to most meetinghouses, temple interiors do contain original works of art. The artwork in the earliest temples was composed largely of portraits of both male and female church leaders, scenes from Mormon history, and romanticized views of historical sites. Today the paintings are usually landscape paintings or oil-painted reproductions of authorized images that one would also see in meetinghouse hallways. Stained glass windows have made a resurgence in the past decade, most of them being produced by the Utah-based Holdman Studios.

Murals have also reappeared: common in late-19th- and early-20th-century Mormon temples, they were absent for most of the 20th century. The murals are used to create a sense of theater in the Creation Room, Garden Room, and World Room—spaces that act as metaphors for mankind's progression through life. The murals of the Nauvoo Temple took 18 months to complete and were executed by six Mormon artists, Frank Magleby, James C. Christensen, Chris Young, Robert Marshall, Douglas Fryer, and Gary Smith. The artists worked in a large studio in Provo, Utah, and then the Church transported the murals to Illinois for installation.

As the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints continues to add approximately 275,000 new converts a year and as old buildings need repair or replacement, Mormon architecture will continue to evolve. Adaptability to cultural change has been key to Mormon architecture's endurance, whether geographical or economic change and now environmental change as the church is pursuing environmentally sustainable buildings. Yet Mormon architecture is also working in the presence of the past as concern for preservation of historic structures increases. Latter-day Saints use buildings such as the Salt Lake and Nauvoo temples and their architectural motifs as material forms of cultural ballast that balance the needs of the present with the solutions of the past.

Josh Probert is a graduate of the Program in Religion and the Arts at Yale Divinity School and is currently a Ph.D. candidate in the Program in American Civilization at the University of Delaware in cooperation with the Winterthur Museum.

Photos on this page courtesy of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Intellectual Reserve.

'Tree of Life' stained-glass window by Holdman Studios, Winter Quarters Nebraska Temple, Omaha, Nebraska.

San Salvador Temple Ordinance Room.

HOLY FIRE

The Zarathustrian Faith and its Places of Worship

By Cyrus Subawalla

The Ateshgah fire temple in Surakhany, Azerbaijan, attracts 15,000 visitors a year.

As a practicing architect, rather than as a theologian, I write this article about the faith I was born into. I consider myself a lifelong student, trying to find associations between the rare texts of our faith and the even rarer architecture that embodies the written word. One should consider this essay as a morsel (if that) to spur interest in the more profound literature written by scholars such as Mary Boyce, Stanley Insler, Iraj Taraporewala, Sir J.J. Modi, Dastoor Kayoji Mirza, A. V. W. Jackson, and Geo Widengren, among others.

By most accounts the prophet of our faith, Zarathustra (or Zoroaster, as he is known in the Hellenic world) was born around 600 BCE, though some scholars place him more along the time of Abraham, which would date back to 1500–1800 BCE. Yet others date him to an improbable 6000 BCE. His place of birth is generally stated as Azerbaijan (then northern Persia), although this also is uncertain because scholars vary in their opinion, with some claiming his place of birth as far east as China or as far west as Egypt.

Historians are agreed that Zarathustrianism, also known as Zoroastrianism (Hellenic term), is the first monotheistic religion, whose creed holds that there is one almighty God (Ahura Mazda) who manifested his munificence through the elements of nature, namely fire, water, earth, and wind. In its respect for the worship of natural elements, the Zarathustrian faith has similarities to the religions of ancient Greece and especially to Hinduism, the religion followed by the majority in India. The sacred texts of the two faiths, the Avesta and the Vedas, have distinct similarities. (In fact some scholars believe that Hinduism is not really polytheistic but is, rather, a complex belief system where the different gods and goddesses are manifestations of Lord Vishnu.) Zarathustrians are often simplistically mislabeled as fire worshippers, which prevents a sophisticated and comprehensive understanding of the faith, its rituals, and the physical spaces within which they are performed. Among academics and historians of religion, Zarathustrianism is accepted as a fairly rational and scientific faith, even by current standards. The suggested way of living, the disposal of the dead, and the means and methods for prayer are as relevant and as easy to follow now as they were then.

Exterior view of a fire temple in Yazd, Iran.

Interior of the fire temple with one of its fire urns, in Yadz, Iran.

The Temple

In its most primordial form, the roof of the Zarathustrian temple is the sky and its four walls are the space bound by human sight. In fact, in its most elemental form, the Zarathustrian temple resides within one's body and all one needs is a source of light, a metaphor for the all-illuminating light of our lord Ahura Mazda. This light is either natural or is created by lighting a fire during time of prayer.

Through the passage of time, an altar was added for lighting the ritual fire and for other ceremonies. As the faith developed over time with royal patronage, it became more of an established religion. This brought with it a priestly class (called mobeds or dastoors) who maintained the fire as a symbol of Ahura Mazda, such that it could be worshiped by congregants at their will. The altar area was then covered, protected, and bound by four corner gateways often known as Chahar Takht or Four Directions, and by the necessary piers, pillars, etc. These gateways were eventually walled-in to create a more formal room, called an Atash Gah. The altar of worship eventually reached a status where there was a need for a physical sanctum sanctorum, a delimited holy space around it, thus giving rise to the fire temple as we know it today. Unlike the Hindu temple or even the early Christian church, the Zarathustrian ritual does not need processional movement or processional space.

There is some similarity between the evolution of the fire temple in India and the synagogues in Europe and later in North America. After the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 CE, the synagogue (the place of "coming together,") took precedence for Jewish communal worship. For Zarathustrians or Parsis (people from Pars/Persia, as they were ethnically called after they took refuge in India), it was the Atash Gahs and the Atash Kadehswhich evolved into among others the Iranshah (or holiest of holy places of worship) located in Udvada, in the western state of Gujarat, India. A significant number of fire temples for the Zarathustrian Parsis are located in India, a land that gave them refuge from Islamic persecution after the fall of the Sassanian Empire, although a few Parsis still remain in Yazd, Kerman, and Isfahan in Iran today.

There are three levels of hierarchy in Zarathustrian fire temples. The highest is Atash Behram which is a temple consecrated with seven fires created by lightning strikes; the second is Atash Adaran with three fires and the last is Atash Dadgah with one fire. Unfortunately, in the United States there are no Fire Temples in the true sense of the word. This is because building codes, coupled with our community's finances, do not permit a fire to be nurtured at all times.

I have worshiped at numerous fire temples all over India, and there is such diversity to their plan and form that it is impossible to state that there is a prototype. However, there are certain key elements/spaces that repeat themselves in each temple, and that are associated with the ritual performed.

Takht or Entry Portal: Generally Zarathustrian fire temples maintain an entry portal that informs a visitor where to enter the place of worship. In normal circumstances, this marks the area where worshipers have to cover their heads as a sign of respect.

Ante Space: Immediately thereafter, members of the faith wash their hands and faces (and in earlier times their feet as well) and perform a ritual called the Kushti Bastan prayer. The prayer involves the tying of a sacred thread around one's waist. The thread (kushti) and a muslin vest (sadreh) is something worn by every Zarathustrian Parsi, who is initiated into the faith between the ages of 6 and 9 via a ceremony called the Navjote. The recitation of the prayer in the ante space is the equivalent of re-affirmation to the Zarathustrian faith.

Main Hall: After the Kushti prayer, devotees will often enter a large main hall that has no specific ritual purpose other than to hold large numbers of people as they congregate around the sanctum sanctorum, the kiblah, as well as around smaller fires for numerous family-related personal ceremonies.

Kiblah or Sanctum Sanctorum: This is the place where the holy fire burns at all times. These fires have been sustained ever since they were originally lit by lightning, considered to be a manifestation of God's purity. The fires were nurtured and carried to India

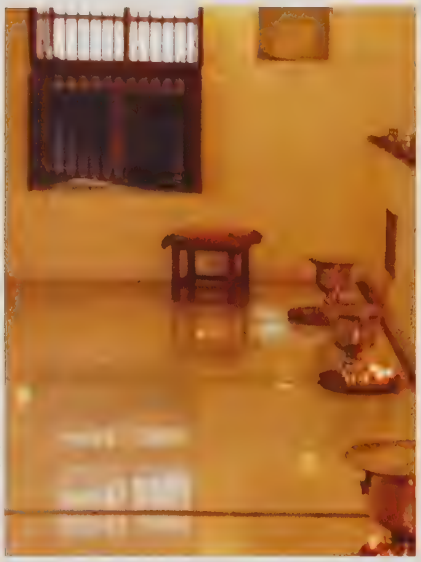


Photo: Courtesy of the author

The fire urns are used by priests in rituals during prayer. These are generally placed on a white cloth on the floor and are for smaller ceremonies, multiple in number.

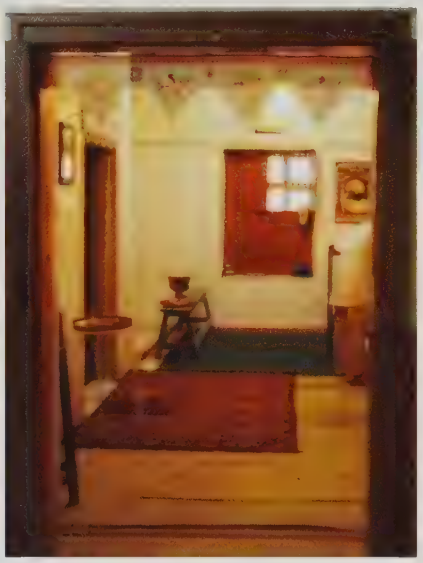


Photo: Courtesy of the author

View of the main hall that surrounds the sanctum sanctorum the kiblah. In this case there is also a smaller ante-chamber around the sanctum sanctorum.

when the Parsis fled ancient Iran, and have been maintained to this day. The main sanctum sanctorum is generally open on three sides to the main hall by either doorways or openings with brass or bronze grills to prevent any unwanted entry within; the fourth wall is blank. Historians have speculated about the symbolism of the blank wall, but functionally it serves as a place for the storage of wood and ash necessary to maintain the burning of the fire. The main sanctum also has a ritual bell, which is chimed by the priest to pray for blessing during the five time periods/transitions of the day, the Gahs. During these transitions, worshipers stand in complete silence with heads bowed, surrendering themselves to the power of Ahura Mazda and the path of righteousness (Asha).

Well: Generally in a temple one will find a well, because water is considered an integral part of the ritual. These wells are often surrounded by a platform for prayer, and will contain aquatic animals as a sign of respect for the equanimity of God's creatures.

Verandahs: Contrary to popular belief, the verandah or covered porch is a non-integral component of temple architecture; it is rather an element from vernacular Indian architecture that serves as an interstitial zone to temper the climate between the hot outdoors and cooler indoors. On these porches, the priests will sprawl on benches or lounge chairs, taking naps or socializing between rituals.

According to numerous census studies, Zarathustrians are destined to become a tribe by the year 2020. This has been attributed to an aging population, a lack of verifiable knowledge of our history, and a lack of will to learn the faith in some depth. There is also a vehement (and somewhat dogmatic) opposition to the inclusion of ethnic non-Parsis into the faith by orthodox members of the community.

The essential history of the Persian Empire has been lost, due to a singular vile act by Alexander, that of the destruction of the great library at Persepolis. Our knowledge, history, and religion are essentially reconstructed through the oral tradition, and we have managed to save a small fraction of our written work. This said, the light shed on our faith and customs, by scholars including those listed above, is invaluable and should be applauded. In the same breath, there is a smattering of young Zarathustrians today who are trying to restore meaning and purpose to our faith via the re-enactment and re-creation of our rituals and ceremonies.

Cyrus Subawalla is a Principal of CSA Partners Ltd., based in Chicago and Mumbai.

View of the main prayer hall. The silver urns holding flowers commemorate the dead in an important ritual called 'Muktad' that lasts for five days. This is followed by five days of reciting the 'Gathas' (Songs of Zarathustra) before the Parsi New Year.

Photo: Courtesy of the author

An exterior view of one of Mumbai's numerous fire temples.

Notes & Comments

Artists of Faith: Engaging the Imagination

Must artists of faith produce works that are religious? For art to be a work of faith must it bring people into the fold? Must art produced by those of faith be labeled as art of a certain religious belief, such as Christian or Muslim; and must that artist be labeled by his or her faith? Contemporary artists and arts movements suggest that the answer is no; labels are not necessary and are often a hindrance to the creative spirit of the artist; art that preaches is often trite in its expression.

Just over a decade ago, John Knox Presbyterian Church (www.jkpcusa.org) in Normandy Park, Washington, put out a call to congregants about starting a visual arts committee. Members slowly came forward, expressing the thought they didn't know church could be a place for art that was modern; most was not traditional Christian art. Leaders at John Knox were going with a vision: to create a safe place for all artists to create and communicate, to share what they believe to be part of the ongoing process of creation. Their vision included a clear message that God is an artist, a giver of gifts. As such, some are blessed with the ability to make art and that ability deserves to be shared, honored, and recognized in whatever form it might take. For this congregation art became a way not just to engage new members, but also a way to reach beyond church walls to engage artists and community members from all walks.

Quote of Note

"A work of art is the trace of a magnificent struggle."

Robert Henri, 1865-1929

Beginning in August, 2011, the church's gallery space featured an exhibition by members of the New Creations Program at Seattle's Union Gospel Mission (www.ugm.org). This innovative program, with the help of city funding, brings professional artists to the Mission to work with those in the shelter to provide instruction in visual arts as a means of healing, recovery, and exchange. Dan Hammer, who is John Knox's Director of Worship, Music, and the Arts, describes the exhibition as "outsider art." The exhibit welcomes people into the church community while creating a place to share thoughts visually for both congregants and artists. In turn, congregants will visit the Mission on the gallery's monthly art night. Some of the art may be rough and raw, but clearly these are works showing the deep internal struggle that many face in modern life and where faith may meet the struggle. This church strongly believes that God is still at work in the world and that art being made in the present is relevant to today's faith exploration.

Composer Chris Estey, named one of DaCapo's Best Music Writers of 2010 and a frequent commentator on Dick Staub's Kindlings Muse (dickstaub.com/podcasts/the-kindlings-muse/hales/podcasts), says the arts can help the church reinvent itself. Instead of focusing on the artifacts of religion, congregations can embrace the modern by engaging authentic art that inspires while providing safe refuge. As illustrated in his discussion, "The Gospel According to Motown," on the Kindlings, a living religion is one that is alive with the arts. He cites Marvin Gaye's "What's Going On" for its enduring spirit. While not composed as a religious piece of music, this song transcends time as it embraces the moment, the feeling, the anguish, and the struggle of the time; in the end it has become a timeless classic, a song where people of many faith backgrounds can find common ground, reflecting God's present spirit. The beauty of this particular piece is that it does not offer answers, it simply asks the tough questions, using belief as a building block to explore the life of a moment in time. He says, further, the joy of modern music is that through the gift of creativity, artists can find ways to express the joy of their own journey, express doubts in an open and safe place, and revel in the beauty of the human experience. Beliefs build the foundations of a space for being, he says, for contemplative reflection, and for the building of a community of artists of faith. Congregations then can become safe havens for artists, musicians, and dancers to explore their own spirit, their faith, and community.

In his more than 25 years leading the journal *Image* (www.imagejournal.org), writer and professor Gregory Wolfe has witnessed many changes and an opening of the relationship between faith and the arts. There is rising intrigue across cultures about the relationship between art and faith, with change as an essential element. Art, like faith, is an exploration of discovery filled with questions and intriguing pathways that open an invitation to the imagination. In his recent book, *Beauty Will Save the World*, he writes: "Art, like religious faith in general and prayer in particular, has the power to help us transcend the fragmented society we inhabit." Further, "Christian artists must depict the human condition in all its fullness before they can find ways to express the grace of God.... Christian artists must be confident enough in their faith to be able to explore what it means to be human." For artists, art does not necessarily have to contain some element of worship. Art should contain the story of the struggle, a meeting of form and content to bring together concepts, ideas, and themes that if expressed in words alone are often unreachable, abstract, and fraught with confusion. Art then, whether literary, visual, musical, or kinetic, becomes the place where big ideas begin to make sense. Faith, Wolfe goes on to say, is about beauty that attracts us, a way of living, an exchange of ideas, and a consciousness that brings together communities to engage the present.

Where art and faith meet is limited only by the vastness of imagination. Congregations embracing the arts provide a place for people to gather, reflect, express, and share without constraint of specific theology or form of worship. Without labels, all can use the arts to work through the questions and struggles daily confronting a person of faith. Creation is ever-present and artists of faith assist in the journey toward understanding, transcendence, and transformation. God is found in the raw materials, whether paint, instrument, pen, or body.

— *Ann Kendall*

Ann Kendall is a writer based in Seattle, Washington

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Not My Religion

The Last Word ✶ Brigit Crosbie

When I was recently asked "Why aren't you religious?" I found myself tongue tied, grasping at an answer I couldn't seem to articulate. When I imagined this conversation in my head, I always saw myself giving a young Richard Dawkins-like answer, pulling quotes, facts, and scripture to use as artillery against my interrogator. But nothing goes in real life as it does in our fantasies, and my answer fell short of its intended persuasiveness. It turns out I gave a resounding, "I don't know." This exchange stayed on my mind, though, and I started to reflect on the root of my lack of faith. I was brought up as a church-going Episcopalian, attending Sunday school, and bonding with my "church family." But I never remember religion being something that was central to the way my parents chose to raise me or instill my values. There was no "What would Jesus do?" or saying grace before dinner. Church didn't stick. I never felt the bond or connection with God that was preached, or the faith that I saw around me at church. It left me feeling like an outsider looking in, and made going to church nothing more than tiresome.

But as I grew older, the ideas of faith and religion interested me more and more. Whether I was looking for the reason that I couldn't find my own faith, or reassurance that others couldn't find theirs, I started reading. For the first time I was given the view that not only was a lack of faith in God not uncommon, but it was seen by some authors and artists as the rational point of view. I began to feel more comfortable with a more critical view of religion.

As I learn more about the world around me, I think the main reasons people my age have disconnected from religion are the aspects of it (at least in Christianity) they can't support. I can't speak for all teenagers, but I do know that those I have grown up with don't agree with certain positions that some denominations take on important issues. Take the issue of gay marriage, for example. Most of my friends don't see the reason it shouldn't be allowed. So to us, religion is being used as a way to oppress a population, an excuse to hate a group of people because of a certain Bible scripture or belief. While I'm aware that people protesting gay marriage on the street corners don't represent Christianity as a whole, these are the people we see on the news. These are the people who, to many of my generation, represent Christianity. The radicals we see on the news morph the idea of being religious into something we don't want to be a part of.

I have used my own views on religion as a lens through which I might understand why it seems other people my age have moved away from organized religion or a traditional view of faith. I think a modern faith community should engage the time we are living in. Green architecture, more accepting values, and a more contemporary approach to the needs of parishioners would make faith and religion more palatable to people of my generation.

The writer is a senior at Valley Regional High School in Deep River, Connecticut.

Editor's Note: In each issue, The Last Word will feature the views of a guest columnist.

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